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ABSTRACT

The Council for the Development of French in Louisiana, as part of its effort to revive French in Louisiana schools, arranged for a number of teachers from Belgium, France, and Quebec to assume teaching positions in that state. This report describes the experiences and attitudes of those teachers. Attitudes toward language maintenance, and specifically toward the issue of standard French versus Cajun, were varied and to some extent correlated with the teacher's country of origin. The adaptability of the teachers and the interplay between common linguistic heritage on the one hand and cultural differences on the other are central concerns of the report. A narrative of personal experience, in French, by one of the teachers involved is included. (JB)

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ED195131

Gérald L. Gold

**The Role of France, Quebec and Belgium
in the Revival of French in Louisiana Schools**

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
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*We don't want to make this area French-speaking. We want to make it bilingual . . .
It isn't the English that deprived us of our language. We did it to ourselves.
I've told this to the legislature 15 times — I'd be the first to come to you and tell you "don't spend your money anymore".*

James Domengeaux, President
Council for the Development
of French in Louisiana
February 13, 1977

In 1968, the Louisiana legislature created the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL), a state-supported agency to develop and preserve the French language in Louisiana. French, which had lost its official status between the Civil War and 1917 was reinstated as an official language, and laws were passed that would assure the teaching of "second" languages at the elementary school level and permit the training of second language specialists. And, on the grounds that few Louisianans were qualified, the CODOFIL school programme grew rapidly with two complementary developments: the massive introduction of foreign francophone teachers, and the creation of the bureaucratic framework for a major programme of second language instruction. Both of these developments were nurtured and personally directed by James Domengeaux, a dedicated and entrepreneurial ex-U.S. representative who has acted as President and political godfather of CODOFIL through its first 10 years. The political and administrative changes that went into the establishment of CODOFIL were heralded as the beginning of a salvage operation, an attempt to reverse the massive linguistic and cultural assimilation of 572,162 peoples of Acadian, European, African and American Indian descent who were of French mother tongue in 1970 (16% of Louisiana's population). French usage, even in the French-Catholic parishes of the south, dropped off sharply below the age of 40, and the prospects for a francophone or even a francophile Louisiana was bleak.

CODOFIL and Domengeaux's goal of rapidly redressing a cultural and linguistic catastrophe, and of creating a bilingual Louisiana, justified the annual importation, after 1972, of as many as 300 foreign French teachers and supervisory personnel. However, such a programme would have been difficult were it not for a rapid coalescence of interest and indirect financial support to CODOFIL by the governments of France, Quebec and later Belgium, each of which entered into separate and often bilateral agreements with the State and with CODOFIL. The history and the details of the rapid growth of the programme have been dealt with elsewhere (e.g. Smith-Thibodeaux, 1977) and will be developed further in forthcoming monographs. In this paper, the immediate sociological concern is the implication of bringing together trans-national assistance as part of a movement of ethnic and linguistic revival. Can a linguistic community based on historically — distant ties revive and legitimate the French language in the context of a minority that is heterogeneous by almost any indicator: ethnic, racial, social, economic, and even linguistic?

Besides the heterogeneity of the host society, several other issues regarding ethnic revival in Louisiana are raised by the trans-national programmes. Specifically, can linguistic affinities be a basis for the transfer of those pre-requisites that are necessary to assure the institutional completeness (Breton, 1964) of a minority that has been left with virtually no extra-familial institutions? A corollary to this question, is whether the trans-national programme represents a coalescence of intrinsically similar francophone interests, or is it an alliance of quite divergent national interests, and even of conflicting ethnic ideologies. Secondly, is it possible for foreign francophones interests to share or to even comprehend on a short term basis, francophone ideologies within Louisiana? Thirdly, can such outside

inputs effect a metamorphosis within a regionalized and entrenched ethnic population who have a very undeveloped or non-existent notion of their own "national" status? A fourth issue is whether transplanted francophone teachers would be able to adjust to a spontaneous cultural revival that has started to occur outside of the bureaucratic, state-public sphere of education.

This report is addressed to but one aspect of these general issues — does linguistic affinity lead to the adequate adaptation of the foreign francophones to the Louisiana educational system, as well as to the surrounding francophone or non-francophone communities?

The Louisiana school system is but one of the many public institutions that Louisiana Cajuns and Creoles have adapted to on the terms of the American anglophone majority. That is, while a substantial number of principals and teachers in South Louisiana are of French mother tongue, this particular aspect of their heritage has probably not been an advantage to them in achieving their status. French-use was discouraged and even punished in elementary schools, and a very formal written approach to high school French only served to further the stigma that some had attached to their Cajun and Creole dialects. It follows, therefore, that the arrival of a foreign francophone, with his standard, written French, may not be welcomed enthusiastically by those for whom French has been an obstacle that they have already overcome. Others have taken a more extreme position, that the foreign teachers are teaching a foreign tongue. Furthermore, the prevailing attitude among French Louisiana parents, in 1969, was that nothing should deter their children from acquiring the mastery of the dominant language. French programmes were to be greeted as a luxury, a frill with some sentimental and utilitarian value (Savells, 1969: 126-135).

The paradox for the foreign French teacher, frequently surrounded in his school by Cajun or Creole French-speakers, is that French use has not been valued in this public context. Although, for many, French use plays an important role in everyday private and familial contexts.¹ In general the foreign teachers have had absolutely no preparation for the social and cultural context of Louisiana French. While this may not seem to be part of their mandate, it is of course these private contexts that generate the appropriate cultural behaviour for public contexts — role models that are not readily discernible to outsiders.

Faced with these two behavioural contexts, school and community, my hypothesis is that the response of the foreign francophone teachers, will be strongly shaped by national differences. The differences reflect the relative minority status of the foreign francophones in their own countries, their linguistic ideologies, the acceptance of decentralized, non-authoritarian bureaucratic structures, and their familiarity with North American community organization. Our initial working hypothesis was that the European teachers would have the greatest overall problems in bureaucratic and community adaptation, but that these difficulties would be surmounted by a higher level of teacher training and experience. We thought that the North American francophones would compound their

¹Mother tongue statistics are notoriously inaccurate for the Louisiana French. Given the heterogeneity in spoken Cajun and Créole, and a tendency to de-emphasize French ability (at least in 1970), the actual number of people of French mother tongue is probably much greater than 572,162. However, the actual number of persons who *speaks French on a daily basis*, may be no more than 250,000.

The rate at which linguistic ability in French declines by age is demonstrated by the results of a 1977 Parental survey of all schools (23,260 students) in Iberia Parish. Although about 1/3 of the parents *speaks* French, and 56% of the grandparents, only 11% *hear* French spoken "most of the time", and 33% of the children hear French "some of the time". As for children who can speak French, 10% do so "some of the time" and an insignificant number speak "much of the time" in French. As the question specifies "other language" and not simply "French", the 644 students who hear Spanish or another language other than French (4%) may have affected the "children speak" response. When the same parents were asked if they wanted second language education for their children, 19% said "no", and of those who said "yes", 13% chose Spanish, 86% chose French.

difficulties of institutional and of community adaptation by assuming that their cultural background is congruent with that of the Louisiana Cajuns. In addition, the predominant role of English in everyday life, and especially in the school setting, was thought to be an element which would further exasperate the inter-linguistic conflict with which the Quebecois are familiar in Canada. In the final analysis, if there were to be difficulties in Louisiana, we reasoned that the Europeans would fall back upon their imported channels of hierarchical communication, while the Quebecois might resent the absence of the supportive institutions to which they are accustomed as North American francophones.

Before approaching the data on the integration of foreign francophones into communities and schools, it is imperative that I outline the basic social composition of French Louisiana and identify those groups or strata of French Louisianans who are involved in a "French Movement". Then, after identifying their objectives and ideologies, I will turn to the ideologies and objectives of the French, Belgian and Quebec government agencies that are providing French language training in Louisiana schools. This then leads to the data on which this paper is based: interviews and selective classroom observation in the closing months of the 1976-1977 school year with a sample of French elementary school teachers from France, Quebec, Belgium, New Brunswick (*Acadie*), and Switzerland (47 of 252 teachers).²

The interview schedule was designed to draw out the social and cultural background of the foreign francophones, their relative integration into local communities, their integration into the scholastic community and bureaucratic structures of the educational system, and the degree to which they shared their home country's ideological or pragmatic reasons for extending aid to Louisiana schools.

Also interviewed were their instructional supervisors (6 of 10 French, Belgian and Quebecois *conseillers pédagogiques*), and the directors of the CODOFIL programme. Supplementary interviews were conducted in 1978 with civil servants based in Brussels, Paris, Montreal and Quebec City, who are responsible for the bureaucratic arrangements, negotiations and policy-making that govern the placement of Louisiana's "International Brigades" (Smith-Thibodeaux, 1977).

Louisiana French and French Louisiana before CODOFIL

After the Civil War, the White Creole Planter elite was unable to maintain its political ascendancy and the erosion of French as the dominant language in Louisiana continued precipitously through to the 1920's when the last vestiges of the legal status of French were removed (Kloss, 1971). French survived in the countryside and in small towns of Louisiana despite strong anglicizing pressures from urban-based institutions. In rural areas it was, and still is a language of work, and of local level politics (Gold, 1979). But, French as a written language never took popular roots among the Acadians, Blacks, Free People of Colour and their descendants.

The centuries old split between the rural Acadians (Cajuns) and the (White) Creoles of the towns never permitted the emergence of Cajun political movements or of a national Cajun identity. Creole and Cajun, once separate identities, were blurred in rural areas, and in New Orleans, Francophone Creoles retreated to relative insignificance. But the Cajun

²The interviews with the French teachers were carried out by Paul Leventhal, and the *Conseillers Pédagogiques* and other CODOFIL interviews were conducted by G.L. Gold — all in 1977-1978. Louise Fournier and Lili Larouche assisted with the tabulations and statistical analysis which is not completely reported in this paper.

The research was sponsored by a grant from the Ford Foundation and carried out in collaboration of Eric Waddell and Louis-Jacques Dorais (Université Laval).

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population grew through demographic and geographic expansion, incorporating new ethnic groups with the opening of the westward frontier, but never drawing together through ethnic institutions larger than the family. Black Creoles and the Free People of Colour also retained tenaciously to both Cajun and Creole dialects and an Acadianized culture, although their hopes for ethnically-based political power were dashed during Reconstruction (Waddell, 1978).

For the French speaking peasants in the rural areas, many living in self sufficient autarky, there was no opposition that would justify the formation of ethnic ideologies and there were no elites who could effectively articulate those ideologies. French Louisiana, at the end of the 19th century was racially, culturally, and linguistically homogeneous. When Bertrand wrote of *Many Louisianas* (Bertrand, 1955) he could well have written about the many ways of being French in Louisiana.

Still, the Catholic Church served most of the Cajun populations and created an important socio-political basis of difference with the Protestant North (or with most of the South). Unlike Franco-American New England, there was no imported ideology to unite all francophones in a national church and no Irish opposition to solidify a religious basis for ethnic nationalism. The Church was undoubtedly an element in the loose sharing of identity that criss-crosses the Cajun and Creole populations of the state. This, combined with the Westward movement of French populations, shared food patterns, and shared elements of Acadian heritage were sufficient to create a vague, common notion of territoriality, and shared notion of difference (cf. Gold, 1977). In this post-bellum period, and even before the Civil War, a small, literate Acadian bourgeoisie ("Cajun" was unflattering at that time) emerged in the larger towns such as Lafayette, Opelousas, St. Martinville, Breaux Bridge and New Iberia (Conrad, 1978). This new class cultivated an erudite interest in its Acadian origins, building on the myth of Evangeline.

The old order was profoundly transformed by Huey Long's introduction of universal public education in the thirties, by first the old boom followed by agricultural mechanization, and then by the Second World War — all of which brought about an unparalleled displacement of manpower from traditional occupations. The result was the social collapse of the encapsulated rural communities, the last reservoirs of unilingual French speakers. By the 1950's thousands of French-speaking share-croppers had quit cotton-farming in the Great Southwestern Prairies, abandoned sugar cultivation in the Cajun-Creole Teche area, and in the bayous of the east, the expansion of petroleum based industries altered the lifestyles of Cajun trappers, fishermen and planters. These changes, with their critical socio-linguistic consequences altered the fundamental conditions in which French had thrived.

The changes in the countryside created a rural Cajun petty bourgeoisie — people who turned from share-cropping to business, and still served their communities in Cajun French. They were the first to revive the oral culture of the countryside in the villages, turning to local radio and record companies (Gold, 1976; 1978). But the population of service centres increased, schools were centralized and education, financed almost entirely from state petroleum revenues, became a state-sponsored death blow to French in Louisiana. The new schools and public institutions made no allowance for French and often punished children for the use of French in the schoolyard. While French continued as a language of communication among adults, it became a stigmatized tongue, heard with decreasing frequency in public contexts. Significantly, out of this same state-supported threat of assimilation would come a reversal that promises to preserve French by making Louisiana bilingual. In the 1930's, such a movement might have drawn on more francophone support in Louisiana, but the leaders and the schools did not yet have their urban constituency.

This is not to say that some Cajun politicians did not use ethnic identity to be elected. In the 20's and 30's Dudley Leblanc, who wrote and published two volumes on Acadian

history, made extensive use of French language radio, to boost Acadian identity, both to get elected and to sell patent medicines. In the 1930's he led two Church supported missions to Nova Scotia via Montreal, and received other missions from Quebec, l'Acadie, and France (cf. Bernard, 1937). Also, in the late thirties, there was a brief revival of French in universities and even in high schools, that culminated in the construction of the Maison Française at Louisiana State University. But all of this activity was centered around the small Acadian and White Creole elites of the larger towns. It had little continuity and French remained marginal to schools. Nevertheless, through the 1960's, the same champions, mostly politicians, lectured repeatedly for a Cajun French cause and represented Louisiana quietly in francophone organizations.

But, by the late 60's, despair moved some advocates to more radical positions. Set amidst the flurry of ethnic movements in the nation as a whole, parish leaders in Louisiana began seeking a leader for a movement to bring French back to the schools. Part of their fervor was no doubt spurred on by outsiders. Some of the most provocative articles were written by Raymond Rogers, a Lafayette-based Canadian political scientist who later assisted in negotiating international agreements for CODOFIL (Rogers, 1966). Also instrumental were journalists from Quebec and from France who brought the Louisiana situation to the attention of Phillippe Rossillon, Rapporteur of General De Gaulle's recently formed Haut Comité de la Langue Française.

The result of this concern was the formation of CODOFIL and the arrival of the 'International Brigades' of foreign French teachers. Some of the general features of CODOFIL's organization and of the bureaucratic structure established for the foreign French teachers are indispensable in understanding the context for the arrival of foreign French teachers in Louisiana.

CODOFIL and the French Movement

The French programme in the schools, with the support of the foreign languages section of the Louisiana State Department of Education, expanded faster than the capacity of CODOFIL to thoroughly involve the French-speaking population of the southern parishes. The goal of the programme is *second language training that would create a bilingual Louisiana as a window on the French speaking world*. A bilingual Louisiana would reverse a situation of "self-depreciation and shame" as representative F. Edwin Hébert, one of Domengeaux's supporters, explained to Congress. French heritage was Louisiana's "last chance to create an innovative social milieu which would make it unique in America" (Hebert, 1974: 6). Furthermore, commercial ties and investment from the francophone nations were an inevitable result of bilingualism. Louisiana's export would be both commercial and cultural — "Cajun music becoming 'in' in the francophone capitals of the world" (op. cit: 7). Going much farther than any leaders of the black community, Hebert added that "the French-speaking black American will be a bridge between the United States and the emerging countries" (op. cit: 6). CODOFIL press releases repeatedly stressed that this was *not a nationalistic course of action* and that it is directed at all of the people of Louisiana. "The supplanting of English," Domengeaux insists, "is in no part of CODOFIL's policy". But support for the French language would be of *value to the state as a living language* that could provide a "bond between peoples in Louisiana" while at the same time permitting French speakers to retain "their individuality" (Domengeaux, ND: 1-2).

In practice though, CODOFIL never addressed itself to a possible contradiction between the massive importation of foreign francophones and a movement to preserve and develop a national language. The answer to this problem is that the foreigners would be needed now, with a second language specialist programme to assure a Louisiana takeover. While my immediate concern is not the technicality of implementing a Louisiana takeover after foreign aid has run its course, it is extremely important that parish school

administrators and American teachers are constantly mentioning that this changeover, now eight years in the making, must be completed. The introductory remarks by J. Kelly Nix, the Superintendent of Public Education to the CODOFIL handbook for "Administrators for French as a Second Language" emphasize the imminent takeover by Louisianans: "Once the elementary school programs can be absorbed by Louisiana teachers, the future of the French Language and Culture in Louisiana will be assured".

From 1972 onward teachers were sent to both the francophone south and the anglophone north, filling posts in whatever parishes would accept French teachers. Thirteen CODOFIL parish chapters were established, only in the south of the state, and assisted in the local-level placement of the foreign teachers, although the presence of the chapters in the eyes of the French teachers was minimal and unimportant on a day-to-day basis.

The CODOFIL head office in Lafayette was closer to the teachers, especially in handling their legal and administrative problems, and later, in the development of educational television resources. But, the activities of CODOFIL as an organization were kept to a very minimal level. The office was staffed by foreign teachers, and a string of directors rarely stayed more than a few months. The absence of permanent qualified people, and the very personalistic manner by which the foreign exchanges were negotiated, brought about a concentration of authority and decision-making in the President, James Domengeaux.

Also apparent in this revival, is that much of the political influence in its organization is concentrated in the persona of James Domengeaux. So effective and pervasive in his control, that virtually every parish leader, *conseiller pédagogique* and foreign inter-governmental affairs official, made the passing comment that CODOFIL is Domengeaux. Many were worried, as is Mr. Domengeaux himself, about how the programme would continue when its 71 years old president had to retire from office.

In the eyes of the population of Louisiana, the CODOFIL revival is visible through a barrage of newspaper publicity, published French lessons, and radio and television programmes, and thousands of cardboard posters that the French teachers distributed to urge merchants, parents and others to speak French. Nonetheless, the initial rush of enthusiasm for CODOFIL at the beginning of the 1970's has since abated as the programme has become accepted and even routinized in the schools. The considerable initial psychological victory for French speakers of having, at last, the possibility of a French language movement that speaks for them, was never translated into wide scale participation. In particular, Black French speakers, especially those outside the school system, withdrew virtually all active participation in CODOFIL, even though a substantial percentage of students in CODOFIL classes are blacks.

It follows that the foreign francophone, virtually parachuted into this new and very complex socio-political milieu, may not always have found well-springs of support within the Louisiana schools. This is especially serious in South Louisiana where there was disagreement on non-cultural aspects of CODOFIL (this has since changed), and where Cajun administrators were not always pleased to see even token francization if they thought it would hinder effective Americanization. In fact Domengeaux repeatedly says the same thing to public audiences. Inevitably, the serious inability of some of the first French teachers to adapt to Louisiana schools or even to teach French, led to the development of resentment among American teachers who were as uninformed what the programs was about as the foreigners were about their schools.

Even for the foreign teachers who were successful, visa requirements dictated that they could not stay longer than two or three years. Many of the most qualified (from France and Quebec) can remain only one year because of professional regulation in their home countries. Adding to the problem, every year, as many as a fifth of the Quebecois returned home for Christmas — permanently. The resulting discontinuity would lead to students

re-starting the CODOFIL Frère Jacques programme as many as three times. Some educators spoke of annual shifts from French French to Quebec French to Belgian French, and even to Cajun French if they were given equivalent vocabulary, but we have no evidence that this problem exists for the children. (It was heatedly discussed by the *conseillers pédagogiques* in 1974-1975). Finally, from the beginning, there were no firm plans as to how the programme would be carried on at the post-elementary level, and the preferred CODOFIL teaching method, the Frère Jacques method, for which Louisiana was given 200 kits by France, was not adapted to the first grade until 1974-1975. (Braem, 1977).

In short, as was summarized by an urgent trans-national evaluation team in 1976 (Debyser *et al.*, 1978: 1), the programme had no clear objectives or even student constituency. It could not be followed in a "well-articulated and sequential manner" as specified in Louisiana legislation on second language teaching (Act 714, 1975). Also, the programme was not clearly recognized as essential to language arts in the school, supporting the 'coffee-break' or recreation attitude of the permanent teaching staff, that we saw during our own interviewing.

The most trenchant criticism, for it strikes at the very charter of the organization, is that the CODOFIL programme is related only vaguely to the Louisiana French language and culture, and this is "reinforced by the fact that the same program . . . is being used in both anglophone and non-anglophone settings". We would go further, and add that the programme does not teach French in a manner that could make a smooth transition between the French that we heard while carrying out interviews in some 600 homes in 1976-1978, and the European syntax and vocabulary that is taught in the schools. Little or no local cultural material is introduced into the classes, except as an appendage to European materials. This is so despite the presence of some well established Federal Title VII programmes in French speaking parishes, two of which, St. Martin and Lafayette, have developed their own curricula based on local Cajun culture.

The CODOFIL response to any suggestion that Cajun French be introduced into the classroom has been strongly negative. Spokesmen for CODOFIL assert that the Cajun "dialect", different from parish to parish, would not be understood in Paris or in the Ivory Coast, and cannot cope with the demands of a modern international idiom. In Domengeaux's words, "there is no literature, there is no grammar, there is no formality" (UPI, 9/23/1977). In other words, is Cajun French looking backward to everything that the CODOFIL Movement wished to resist? With that kind of resolute position, it is understandable that a foreign teacher, anxious to please his employer would stick rigourously to standard French. And, those who did not, would merit close attention as to why they should choose to break step with CODOFIL policy.

Another serious problem, which is absent from the evaluation report, lies in the very decentralized and sometimes anarchic structure of the Louisiana school system that both permitted the development of the CODOFIL programme by winning support in influential parishes, and then prevented its rigourous standardization along a European model that was the preference of European advisers. This is clear when the independence from central control of each school board and of each school is understood as part of the local level political autonomy that characterizes Louisiana parish politics. The relationship between CODOFIL, the State Department of Education, the *conseiller pédagogique*, the school principal and the parish school system is the hierarchical framework into which the foreign teachers are placed. This leads to confrontation between local socio-political realities and the school programmes that educators would like to see in the curricula. For the foreign teacher looking upward, the system may be bewildering. However, the confusion may have begun from the moment that he was recruited.

The teacher is selected in his home country by criteria that vary greatly from one nation to another, and from one year to the next. In 1976, recruiting in Quebec was

through newspaper adds for bilingual university graduates. The Ministère des Affaires Inter-Gouvernementales in Quebec then made its selection together with representatives from the Louisiana State Department of Education. Few certified language teachers were available for the 5,000 dollars a year paid by CODOFIL, and Quebec did not offer a salary supplement. In France, the programme has shifted from hiring alternate military service candidates (*coopérants*) and graduates of Catholic normal school, to certified teachers who are paid government bonus. The Belgians, who sent their first major contingent in 1975, have recruited through the normal schools, permitting only certified teachers to Louisiana.

CODOFIL and the State Department of Education played an increasing role in the selection of the teachers. In Belgium and France the Louisianans were permitted to sift through the dossiers of applicants. The Belgians were, for the most part, interviewed shortly before their departure for Louisiana and many of the French were not interviewed until after they had arrived in Louisiana. Despite these differences in recruitment and selection, none of the nations provide a thorough preparation for the Louisiana experience, although Quebec has a two week training workshop in Cap Rouge, Quebec, and France is instituting one this year.

Each teacher signs a contract with CODOFIL that outlines the rate of pay and the capsulized duties of classroom and resource. The contract closes with loosely worded conditions that require teachers to "respect the laws, customs and traditions of the State", to obtain clearance before giving interviews to any media, and to respect parish and school behaviour and dress codes. Besides the possibility of dismissal for not performing their duties or for an "inability to adapt to the attitudes and social mores of the community of employment", the teachers may be sent home for "*any other valid reason*". In the event of dismissal, the teacher must pay his own trip home (Louisiana State Department of Education Bulletin No. 1460 (Revised): 11).

The contract is regarded as a serious document by the State Department of Education and by CODOFIL and some teachers have been dismissed, even in their last weeks or days of tenure. For example, a Quebec teacher who caused a scandal by dating a black in Avoyelles Parish in 1975 was only re-assigned as a resource teacher. But another Quebec teacher and a French teacher were sent home when they refused to teach the Marseillaise before the 1976 Lafayette visit of President Giscard D'Estaing. Most cases of actual dismissal are related to the inability of a teacher to adapt to classroom or school. *Given this contractual obligation to adapt, the absence of adequate orientation to Louisiana is all the more disconcerting.*

Once in Louisiana, the foreign teacher quickly discovers that the two or three key persons who relate to him professionally are the principal, who assigns schedules and sets the tenor for the operation of the entire school, and the *conseiller pédagogique*, a foreign national, sometimes but not always of a teacher's home country. The *conseiller* supervises the teachers in his region, as many as 24, and coaches them on teaching methods. He (or she) often acts as a middleman between the programme and the teacher, or even between the teacher and the parish school board or between the principal and the teacher.

The parish supervisor, often a political appointee, coordinates CODOFIL teachers within parish schools. Some teachers have also had to deal directly with the parish superintendent of education and even with the members of the school board. Added to these levels of school, parish and sector (*conseiller pédagogique*) were, at least through 1976-1977, bilingual specialists who worked out of Baton Rouge using a tri-partite division of the state. The result is sometimes as chaotic with multiple levels of authority and imprecisely defined obligations. The implication in terms of adaptation within the schools, is confusion in the minds of teachers and supervisors. Survival in this situation requires a balance of pedagogical skill and political acumen, but both of these pre-requisites call for an adequate integration into the school community. However, adaptation is also inseparable from the conditions that led to the hiring, and indirectly, it is related to sharing of objectives between the foreign governments and their representatives in Louisiana.

Objectives of the French Mission in Louisiana

French interest in Louisiana never faded completely after the Louisiana purchase. Throughout the 19th century, a continual stream of French refugees added to the already complex make-up of French Louisiana. The Creole planter elite of New Orleans retained ties with France and many French immigrants married into Acadian families already settled in the interior. The continuity in the French perception of Louisiana over the past fifty years is demonstrated by the rapportage of a distinguished panel of Frenchmen who travelled to Louisiana in 1937 for the 250th anniversary of Cavelier de la Salle's voyage of discovery. Some of their conclusions mirror those that were to be written by journalists in 1976.

... French survival is a very stirring issue, because to speak of survival, is to say that something is dead, as it is certain that what we have seen is a beautiful past ...
(Taillendier, 1937:87 trans.)

This vision of Louisiana is fundamentally a sentimental one of forgotten empire, and of the languid survival of French in Louisiana amid the splendid decadence of the Mississippi. It is the popular myth of Louisiana in France that was intensified by the pre-war film version of *Showboat* and most recently renewed by Denuzière's *Louisiane*, a best-selling French-Creole version of *Gone with the Wind*. The metaphor, that lived on in France was one of separated kin, a myth that gained currency with the French rediscovery of Longfellow's *Evangeline* (cf. Martin, 1935). These comments by the 1937 mission could have referred to a massive interregional exchange programme sponsored by Radio France and CODOFIL in 1976 to restore contact between French and Louisiana 'cousins'.

... like two halves of separated souls who, find each other, and recognize each other, after 150 years, and over so great a distance ... the Marseillaise rings, the speeches are in French, and so is the Mayor's proclamation ... If Acadie has a French grandmother, the great oak, (Evangeline Oak in St. Martinville) the bearded grandfather, tells his granddaughter: go little one, to your destiny ... but return to dance in my shadow, and do not forget, our old songs in your new home. (Ibid: 88)

Even in 1937, there was hope for French participation in a revival movement, signs of which the visitors saw in the new *Maison française* at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. Progress in New Brunswick and a strident Quebec were seen as proof of what could be accomplished. The solution was to be *bilingualism*, on the Canadian model.

With an agreement between Louisiana, Canada, and France, there could be a renaissance of French culture in Louisiana that can be a great enrichment to that state.
(Jarray, 1937: 104)

French participation in French language programmes in Louisiana, with a budget of about one million dollars in 1978, represents only a small percentage of money that France spends annually on *cooperation*, in this case, "foreign cultural action". The assistance began out of the direct concern of the Haut Comité de la Langue Française which, in 1968, was presided over by Philippe Rossillon, a man who has had a deep personal interest and involvement with Acadians and other new world francophones.³ Rossillon decided that the climate in Washington was becoming more favourable to the teaching and revival of second

³Rossillon was also involved in a confrontation with the Canadian government over alleged agitation with nationalist groups in Quebec and in French Canada (l'Affaire Rossillon — 13-15th of September, 1968). But the events in Canada were largely a Federal Government rebuff to Franco-Québécois cooperation, and they may have been instrumental in steering French attentions towards Louisiana and the nascent CODOFIL.

languages to assist Domengeaux from the very outset of CODOFIL, and provided the entree by which the Louisiana politician made a personal plea to President Pompidou to supplement the 30 French coopérants who were already in Louisiana. The response, 176 coopérants in 1972 and the pedagogical materials for the CODOFIL program, assured that the Louisiana objectives would be strongly influenced by French cultural assistance, and perhaps socio-political advice, although the advice was often accepted by the Louisianans with a measured grain of salt. To administer the exchange, a special French association, CEFEME was established that had close ties with the Haut Comité de la Langue Française. Charged with the responsibility of developing teaching methods for Louisiana was BELC, a pedagogical agency attached to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs to provide the worldwide expertise for locally-adapted French teaching. Significantly, it was CODOFIL and CEFEME who undertook the selection of teachers and *conseillers pédagogiques*, only a few of whom had been trained by BELC. All this was an enormous political victory for CODOFIL, and certainly influenced the Quebecois and Belgian decisions to increase their participation.

There are two politically parallel but, different culturally ideologies behind French cooperation. The current ideology is a general and almost instrumental notion of *francophonie* that is held by the Giscard administration and supported by his unprecedented 1976 trip to Louisiana. The objective of this type of aid is to nurture effective foreign French language education both as a first and *as a second language* with the explicit end of maintaining the importance of French as an international language. This goal is not overtly supported by socio-political action as Prime Minister Chirac explained to an international gathering of French language journalists in 1975:

Those of you who went to Louisiana last year* could see with their own eyes, on the territory of the most powerful nation in the world, how important the linguistic community could be in an exchange shorn of any political intentions, and destined only to mutually enrich each partner.

(Chirac, 1975:14)

The logical extension of this approach is for the French Government to place Louisiana in a much broader context that accounts for Franco-Americans and French speakers in New York City, Florida and on the West Coast. In this context, failure or success in Louisiana can be measured by the number of students in effective second language programs (cf. Association Linguistique Franco-Européenne, 1974:170-172). This corresponds to the public or political image of CODOFIL and is the linguistic ideology of the majority of the *conseillers pédagogiques* interviewed in Louisiana.

The second ideology goes back to De Gaulle's establishment of the Haut Comité de la Langue Française and to the first few years of aid to CODOFIL and Louisiana schools, although it is still strongly represented among some of the French officials (especially those with Gaullist tendencies), and even among some of the French teachers. In content, this position approaches the Quebecois view of Louisiana, in that it would seek a *cultural* expression for the linguistic revival and follows intently the political consequences. A nationalist response, as long as it has political implications, would be desirable, if feasible. But this point of view merges with the present Giscardien ideology in that it seeks an outcome that would be favourable to France.

The Gaullist ideology that was at the root of the French interest, strongly flavoured by nationalist and culture-centred interests, corresponds vaguely to the part of CODOFIL ideology that is concerned with French Louisianans being spokesmen for the francophone

* held with the collaboration of CODOFIL!

world (cf. Hébert, 1974). The difference is in the direction of those loyalties. In its more private and regional manifestations, CODOFIL and Domengeaux have made strong statements in the defence of a Cajun (or Acadian) ethnic group. But the efforts by Frenchmen such as Rossillon to encourage CODOFIL to go further with French language radio and with printed media (in English for maximum distribution and potential of mobilization) have met with only mixed success. Meanwhile, those French who are interested in cultural renewal look at what young Cajun activists are doing with consuming interest. The technocrats continue their teacher programme with no knowledge or contact with any alternate possibilities for cultural revival. Their contacts are, after all, inter-governmental and legitimized by CODOFIL.

At the same time as France developed official ties with Louisiana, a wave of interest in everything Louisianan and Cajun swept France. The Government Radio-Inter, under the leadership of Michel Tauriac began exchanges, radio programmes and a friendship association under the rubric of *Louisiane Bien Aimée* ('the Louisiana we love') and leaders of this exchange frequently refer to Louisiana with words of endearment as "notre chère Louisiane". Several Cajun music groups, such as the Frères Balfa visited France after 1974, sparking the creation of Cajun Music groups within France with exotic names such as Bayou Sauvage. Lastly, Zachary Richard, a young Cajun folk-rock musician, whose renditions of Cajun music have a doleful nationalistic message, has become a national folk hero in both France and Quebec.⁴ This resurgence of interest in Louisiana explains why teachers from France are the most informed about Louisiana, although many arrive with a myth of Louisiana that is difficult to reconcile with the reality of communities and the school system.

Objectives of the Quebec Presence in Louisiana

Quebec-Louisiana exchanges date back at least into the 19th century when Quebec-trained parish priests and religious orders sent representatives to French-speaking communities in Louisiana. In the 30's this missionary interest was extended to welcome Dudley Leblanc and his mission of Cajun girls to Montreal on their way to l'Acadie. Also in contact with Louisiana was the Conseil de la Vie Française en Amérique which has appointed representatives in Louisiana to provide reports on the status of the French language. Before 1960, to Quebecois, La Louisiane was a distant outpost of *l'Amérique française*, part of the thinly-spread *survivance* that constituted the spread (*rayonnement*) of French speakers in North America. To the Acadian elite of the Maritime Provinces, Louisiane was an extension of l'Acadie, an incorporeal part of the Acadian myth that grew out of the dramatization of the tragic story of Evangeline. And so, the Quebecois, like the French, had their own myths that had tied them to Louisiana.

The first ties between the Quebec Government and the CODOFIL movement came after a flurry of minor exchanges such as the one between the city Longueuil and the City of Lafayette on youth hostels, the extended visit of Cajun musicians to Expo-67, and in 1966, a permanent joint programme in language training between Université Laval and Louisiana State University. Quebecois also made excursions to Louisiana in the 1960's and Domengeaux recounts that his contact with two travelling Quebecois in 1968 gave him the idea to form CODOFIL.

In 1968-1969, Quebec was in the process of seeking an international vocation, opening offices in major trade cities around the world. The decision to open an office in Lafayette, and staff it with an Acadian delegation head, was a cultural and not an economic decision.

⁴Zachary Richard's records have had almost no distribution in Louisiana on account of the difficulty in getting any French language records or books through the media distributors. Also, Cajun radio shows will not usually play non-local records or music, and the content of Richard's records may, in some cases, be too militant for conservative Cajun tastes. (cf Marcantel, 1978).

There already were Canadian and French consulates in New Orleans, but the Canadian government restricted its support of the new French movement to library donations and to small grants in aid.

The Quebec government was anxious to assure an active cultural presence wherever French was spoken, in America, and elsewhere. In Louisiana, it was important to demonstrate that French could be a living language in North America. This was a fundamental tenet in the external policies of Premier Jean Jacques Bertrand's Union Nationale Government when James Domengeaux and Louisiana Governor John J. McKeithen came to Quebec to negotiate an exchange. A high level delegation headed by Marcel Masse, Minister of Inter-Governmental Affairs, responded by a 1969 visit to Lafayette to officially open the Quebec office.

With a series of organized concerts by Quebec singers to Louisiana (Robert Charlebois, George Langford, and Willie Lamothe), a Quebec cultural presence was established. Then, eighteen Quebecois were sent in 1973 as French language *moniteurs*, and 85, in 1974. This number was reduced to accommodate a more select group in subsequent following years when college graduates were sent specifically as teachers, placing more emphasis on second language training.

The performance of the associate teachers from Quebec was the most controversial of the foreign teachers. Breaking social mores, affiliating closely with musicians and with Cajuns seeking cultural or 'grassroots' revival, the Quebecois created a spirited reaction among conservative Louisianans, particularly French teachers in foreign language departments (sic) who writhed at Quebecois syntax and pronunciations and reacted even more strongly to the obvious ethnic nationalism of the Quebec teachers. The former ran against the internationalist goals of the programme and the latter was an anathema to CODOFIL ideology. Also, since the Quebecois did not fear getting a black mark that would effect their teaching career chances at home, they actively organized an abortive union of French teachers (1976) to demand better conditions from CODOFIL (The real reason, perhaps for their subsequent concentration in Lafayette parish?).

But, the Louisianans openly comment that the Quebecois had the most dynamic approach to revitalizing French in Louisiana, and even the Quebecois were sharply at odds as to how far they should go in 'social and cultural animation'. The staff of the Quebec Office in Lafayette did more than any other foreign agency to establish an internal organization for CODOFIL and to extend its activities beyond the classrooms. The Quebecois participated intimately in the various policy decisions made by CODOFIL, while the more numerous French did not always get that close to everyday CODOFIL decisions that were of social or cultural importance. Also significant were large summer exchange programs in Jonquière and Rivière-du-Loup. Quebec provided a full time specialist to assist the French Government and the State Department of Education in designing a first grade adaptation of the French Frère Jacques method. These essentially culture-oriented policies were continued after a change in mission leadership in 1976, and by the 1977 visit of the Minister of Inter-Governmental Affairs, Claude Morin, to reaffirm the support of the separatist Parti Québécois government.

While the exchange programme grew with a very modest government financial participation, there was a popular or grassroots interest in Louisiana which was at least as important as the school programme. The most important aspect of non-governmental exchanges is clearly music and musicians. André Gladu, a Quebec film maker, popularized the living folklore of Louisiana with a series of films on *le son des Cajuns*. To Gladu, and to many of the French teachers who came to Louisiana, the Cajuns represented the role of popular culture and peasant traditions of work in assuring the survival of French in North America (Gladu, 1972). This is somewhat different than the more cynical and pessimistic attitude that Louisiana represents the inevitable assimilation that Quebec would have

undergone, the message of Gilles Vigneault's popular song, *Quand nous partirons pour la Louisiane*. Since then, many Quebecois have adopted a more sympathetic position that identifies with cultural re-awakening as an extension of the dynamic post 1976 events in Quebec (and thus the Quebecois reaction to the call to *Reveil* (Awaken!) by Cajun singer Zachary Richard). Both the pessimistic and the messianic attitudes toward Louisiana are shared by teachers that Quebec has provided CODOFIL. Moreover, if this cultural baggage that Quebecois bring to Louisiana is not homogeneous, it is distinguishable from the similar but more global objectives of the French and markedly different from the Belgian goal of international service.

The Belgian Mission in Louisiana

The Belgian mission in Louisiana does not have the historical roots and genealogical underpinnings that characterize French and Quebecois participation. There is no Belgian Government office that is explicitly concerned with the extra-territorial promotion of the French language. Such an organization would be politically impossible for the small French-speaking Wallon minority of 4 million people. For this reason, Belgian participation grew out of an explicit request for cooperation from CEFEME in Paris and is coordinated by the francophone half of the Ministry of National Education. A special organization, APEFE, was established to handle the missions of Belgian teachers to Africa, Louisiana and elsewhere.

Interviews with Belgian civil servants and journalists did reveal, however, a background of Wallon nationalist sentiment that strongly supports relations with nationalists groups in the francophone 'community'. It is our understanding from these conversations that former Education Minister Humblet's trips to Louisiana and his commitment to expand the Belgian presence in CODOFIL from its initial status (1973) as a minor adjunct of French participation, were motivated by both strong linguistic affinities, and the desire to place unemployed teachers. Thus from the beginning, the Belgians sent highly qualified teachers to Louisiana, and stationed professional educators in Lafayette to supervise the Belgian mission in the field. Belgian teachers were given a substantial monthly supplement and a Renault car to bring the low CODOFIL salary to Belgian levels.

The objectives of APEFE are expressed in terms of a strict professionalism in their task of teaching standard French to Louisianans. Adaptations to local culture are made but they must not compromise Belgian objectives of service. In this respect, the words of the director of APEFE are reminiscent of Domengeaux speaking to American political assemblies:

Our approach has its origins in the *Belgian experience* from our pragmatism and from our learning of a second language . . . Thus we have an important *service role*, and it's a little bit of a paradox that the service is to assist the *United States to become bicultural* . . . For a long time they turned their backs on anything but the American language. This has had negative repercussions for Americans all over the world.

We would never have attacked this problem with the spirit of linguistic conflict. *The flag of francophonie, 'brandy in the wine', that's not our style* . . .

Our role is to promote the correct instruction of a second language, not to cry to the sound of this or that local song . . . *The executive of our organization has never seen this problem to be a cultural problem*. Local culture is interesting . . . but it is an accessory to the priority of learning a second international language of stature.

(regarding Cajun French) We believe that we have a role to play in perfecting this patois, in bringing them the elements of a language that can be understood everywhere . . . We know all about this from the Wallon (dialect) in our own country . . . There are fools who would rather learn Wallon patois than our second national language (Neerlandais). *With that kind of sentimentalism I believe that we would be wasting the children's time, and ours.*

These comments show that the Belgian exchange programme is, at least officially, esconced within the working official bilingualism of Belgium. Quite secondary is the fact that many Belgian teachers should be inspired by sentiments of francophonie, or that many Wallons are seeking openings to the United States and the English-speaking world. On a regional level, these sentiments are jelling into cultural and inter-regional exchanges such as the twinning of Namur, Belgium with Lafayette, Louisiana, and some cultural exchanges promoted by Belgians with CODOFIL. Nonetheless, the popular wave of interest in Louisiana that has marked French and Quebecois exchanges, is not evident in Belgium and probably never could be in the present socio-political context. This has a direct bearing on the ideologies of Belgian teachers in Louisiana.

The Foreign French Teacher — Description of the Sample

The distribution of Foreign French teachers in the 1976-1977 school year was such that each of ten *conseillers pédagogiques* was able to advise a regional concentration of teachers who were primarily, but not exclusively, of their own nationality. These are, in part, political decisions, with 26 of 36 Quebecois concentrated in Lafayette Parish; the northwest and the west of the state was staffed predominantly by Belgians (and few Quebecois); and the northeast, southcentral and southeastern parishes, as well as the urban areas of New Orleans and Baton Rouge, were covered primarily by teachers from France. The sample of 20% of all teachers was stratified regionally and weighted to over-represent the eighteen French-speaking parishes of 'Acadiana'. Thus 32 teachers were interviewed in these 18 heavily francophone parishes, six teachers in the predominantly Anglophone north, and nine others in New Orleans and Baton Rouge. The proportional inclusion by nationality mirrors the relative representation of each francophone nation over the entire state. Table One summarizes the sample composition and its relationship to the total population of teachers.

TABLE 1
NATIONALITY AND REGIONAL ASSIGNMENT
OF FOREIGN FRENCH TEACHERS IN LOUISIANA 1976-1977^a

NATION RÉGION	FRANCE		BELGIUM		QUEBEC ^b		SWISS ^c		TOTAL	
	State Sample		State Sample		State Sample		State Sample		State Sample	
"Acadiana"	50	9	52	14	33	8	6	1	135	32
	(43.6%)	(56.2%)	(58.4%)	(73.7%)	(91.7%)	(80%)	(85.7%)	(50%)	(54.7%)	(68.1%)
North Louisiana	36	3	30	3	-	-	-	-	40	6
	(31.3%)	(18.8%)	(33.7%)	(15.8%)	-	-	-	-	(16.2%)	(12.8%)
Baton Rouge & New Orleans	29	4	7	2	3	2	1	1	72	9
	(25.2%)	(25%)	(7.9%)	(10.5%)	(8.3%)	(20%)	(14.3%)	(50%)	(29.1%)	(19.1%)
TOTAL	115	16	89	19	36	10	7	2	247	47

- Percentages are in parentheses and apply to column totals.
- The two Acadian teachers in the state are grouped together with the Quebecois. One of these teachers was interviewed.
- Administrative affairs, for the Swiss teachers are handled almost entirely by the French Government representatives. In this paper, the Swiss teachers are aggregated with the French. Several American citizens and a Vietnamese national are not included in the population total or on the sample.

While the teachers are primarily from middle class professional and merchant families, the Europeans are far more 'rural' in origin than the Quebecois. They are also younger (19-23) reflecting both a change from Quebec's earlier policy of accepting community college (CEGEP) students and the crisis in the job market for teachers in Belgium and France. The Europeans, for the most part, were in Louisiana as part of a teaching career, the Quebecois were there for the experience of contact with French Louisiana. The Belgians were the most career-oriented and the most qualified as teachers, followed by the French, while only one Quebecois has a teaching diploma (see Table 2).

Another general characteristic of some importance to the Louisiana situation is the ability to speak second and third languages — especially English. On this count, the Quebecois were proportionally the most adept at speaking English, but they were the least likely to have learned a third language. Also, for political reasons, the Quebecois have manifested the strongest resistance to being placed in solidly anglophone parishes — but learning English is the preferred objective of many Belgians and French. Most of the Belgians and French teachers can speak a third language, usually Spanish, German or Flemish. What is somewhat unusual, is that the Belgians do not react as negatively to the bilingualism of the CODOFIL programme as do the Quebecois or even the French. This may be on account of the fact that the politically dominant language in Belgium is Flemish, and that English is not perceived as negatively as it would be in Quebec, or in France.

Most of the teachers were seeking a chance to travel, and for Europeans, there is a special attraction in travelling to the United States, although for some, Louisiana was a second choice. The older the teacher, the greater the number who came to Louisiana to escape problems of unemployment, and younger teachers were seeking to free themselves from a restrictive family situation.

TABLE 2
SOCIO-ECONOMIC SUMMARY OF THE FRENCH
TEACHERS BY NATIONALITY

	FRANCE (& SWISS)	BELGIUM	QUEBEC (& ACADIAN)
Number of teachers	19	18	10
Number & percentage of females	15 (78.9%)	12 (66.7%)	6 (60.0%)
Percentage single	17 (89.5%)	17 (94.5%)	6 (60.0%)
Percentage age under 23	10 (52.6%)	9 (50.0%)	3 (30.0%)
"Rural" origin	10 (52.6%)	13 (72.2%)	4 (40.0%)
Parents in professions or business	12 (67.7%)	6 (32.0%)	6 (60.0%)
Extensive travel experience	17 (89.5%)	11 (64.7%)	6 (60.0%)
Declared proficiency in English	15 (78.9%)	7 (38.9%)	9 (90.0%)
Teaching diploma	8 (42.1%)	13 (72.2%)	2 (20.0%)

N = 47

There are twice as many female teachers as male teachers, and the men are more concerned about unemployment, although the women have a higher overall level of training! Since the men are more bilingual than women, we speculated as to whether their knowledge of English is seen as compensation for their relative lack of training.

Regional placement of the foreign teachers is also significant, although only the Quebecois are deliberately grouped in the Acadiana heartland. The age of teachers in the north is on the average somewhat higher than in the francophone south and most of the small group of teachers over 27 years old have been posted in urban schools. Also, whether part of CODOFIL policy or not, teachers with urban origins tend to be stationed in urban areas. However, the fact that teachers in the north and in the two large cities are, on the average, more qualified, may be a quirk of sample selection. The presence of an unusually competent *conseiller pédagogique* in Baton Rouge who was able to select his own instructional 'team' may explain some of the imbalance.

In summary, the general characteristics of the foreign teachers do not, if taken individually, suggest the outcome in the relative success of teachers in adapting to their schools or to the community. When we consider extension services, cultural involvement of the teachers and contact with Cajun and American teachers, some rather different patterns emerge. These differences are capsulized in the relative perception of the status of the Cajun minority, of the Cajun dialect, and of life in Louisiana in general.

Adaptation of Foreign French Teachers to Louisiana Communities and to French Louisiana

One of the first signs of adaptation to a new environment is the formation of friendships within the local society. Although the French teachers show quite a varied response to a question on friendship, it is clear that a *majority of the teachers associated primarily with other foreign French teachers*. The exceptions to this generalization occur when the teacher has been posted in a remote parish, such as those in Western or in Northern Louisiana, far from the clusters of French in Lafayette, Lake Charles, Baton Rouge and New Orleans. Several teachers have made a determined effort to integrate themselves into their community, even if this meant speaking primarily in English. The general finding is supported by many Cajuns who objected to the clannish behaviour of the visitors.

Also unexpected, is our finding that the teachers form only casual, working relationships with the 'American' (i.e. non-Cajun or Louisiana francophone) teaching staff. Few Cajun teachers are selected as friends, although more so than the 'Americans'. When asked why this was so, the teachers explained that it was difficult in Louisiana to break into what appeared to be closed social networks. Nonetheless, a half dozen teachers, mostly Quebecois and Frenchmen discovered and associated with the small network of Cajun youth who still speak French together and who are involved in Cajun music and culture. As the Quebecois *conseiller pédagogique* also participated in this network, his example may have opened access to others. Otherwise, the French and the Belgian *conseillers pédagogiques* did not have many intimate ties within the Cajun communities. Their choice of friends may possibly have influenced the range of friendships formed by the teachers who worked for them. Also, I should add that our sampling missed certain striking exceptions such as a Belgian who spoke Cajun French without a foreign accent.

Despite these exceptions, in general, the CODOFIL office staff, approximately ten French teachers and young Cajuns, and the Quebecois, do more than anyone else to facilitate ties with the culturally-active individuals in the Cajun population. At least a quarter of our sample, all Europeans, were unable to make any friendship with French-speaking Louisianans, even if they were living in largely Cajun communities such as Larose or Chackbay.

Several teachers explained that making friends with local French speakers implied forsaking friendships with people of their own age, something that they were unwilling to do. Yet the more the French teachers made contacts with the Cajun community the greater the effort they made to avoid all foreign francophones.

The heavy teaching schedule of at least 8 half hour periods a day is an obstacle to making community contacts, especially in the first year of teaching. This was realized by the Quebec officials after they asked their teachers to both teach and do "cultural animation". Surprisingly, most teachers adapted well to the behaviour codes of segregation and few would cross the racial barrier to seek friendships with blacks. This was a serious problem for the four European teachers in predominantly or all black schools. Added to these constraints is language. A full third of the teachers could not converse comfortably in English. Several deliberately avoided and even dreaded prolonged contacts with English-speakers. These same teachers stressed the superficiality and coldness of their communities. For example, the Swiss teachers who replied:

I don't accept those invitations — because I do not want to sit and sustain an English conversation all evening.

Many of the French teachers live with each other and several have become engaged to other foreign French teachers, Anglo-Americans and Cajuns. We were repeatedly told by seasoned teachers and by programme administrators that renewing a teaching contract in Louisiana was often more tied to the love life of the teachers, than to a strong desire to continue teaching in Louisiana. A study of the leisure time activities of the French teachers confirms their very partial engagement in community activities.

CODOFIL virtually requires the foreign teachers to purchase a car. Exactly half of the 46 page administrative and practical manual is devoted to the intricacies of automobile ownership, insurance, festivals to visit, and Mexican border regulations! Important pages, since travel is what motivated 55.3% (26) of the teachers to come to Louisiana and for 43% (20) of the teachers, it is the preferred leisure activity. Given the limited free time of the French teacher, the investment in travel implies that the community is relegated a much lower priority. *The result is a strong relationship between frequent travel and poor adaptation to school and community.* For most, travel is an escape from the constraints of community and school, and only a few teachers travel with locals, whether they be Cajuns or 'Americans'.

In general the French teachers seem to distance themselves from Louisiana society. Living together may be essential, perhaps to alleviate the financial strain of a low salary and a high cost of living in some oil boom towns like Morgan City or Lafayette. However, only a few teachers have joined local service clubs or community organizations, although the majority take advantage of free university courses.

The most visible social contribution is made by the eleven teachers (23%) who have accepted part time jobs as radio announcers for CODOFIL-sponsored public service broadcasts, and more teachers would prepare broadcasts if they could be made available. Also in the public eye are the nine teachers who were in theatre groups. One of these groups was organized by Quebecois and their young Cajun friends to perform plays in Cajun French that are based on regional folklore. For most teachers, visible community participation means going to parent-teacher meetings. Some teachers claimed that they were required to attend these meetings, while others had been forbidden from any such participation.

Only five teachers gave night adult education courses, an activity that is specifically encouraged by CODOFIL for adult francophones. However, the response to night French courses — with a few exceptions, is not encouraging. For example, in both Lafayette and in Houma, cities with substantial Cajun populations night French courses attracted only a few

regular attenders, mostly non-French speakers. In general, the success of community participation, like the success of the school programme itself, depends largely on the attitude of the principal and of the members of the school board as to how French will be received within the scholastic 'feif' of the parish.

It is difficult to generalize on the teachers' response to Louisiana French, without accounting for nationality, and then region, sex, and age, but a few generalizations were apparent. Most of the teachers have, on occasion, spoken French with Cajuns. Half of the respondents said they understand Cajun French very easily, although they sometimes had difficulty with vocabulary. Some even had to turn to English to make themselves understood. This, we think, is a product of experience and community contacts. Very few teachers are exposed to the major features of Cajun French before coming to Louisiana, and some lamented that this information was not available to them from CODOFIL after their arrival. This is a problem in small communities like Erath and Mamou where Cajun French dominates everyday adult interaction.

When asked to comment on the status of the Cajuns, *most* of the teachers thought that the Cajuns were assimilated into an American way of life, but that they were also somehow "different". Others saw the Cajun as "isolated" or as "living folklore", "doomed to disappear". Very few teachers (5 or 11%) complained about the conditions of life or the quality of the people.

At this juncture it is worth asking why the general perception of *French Louisiana* is somewhat negative. Are the Louisianans rejecting the foreign teachers or are the teachers creating the self-fulfilling prophecy of their own rejection? In the following discussion, nationality is emphasized as one of the critical variables explaining the success of community adaptation. The relative importance of nationality, as opposed to age, sex, and region will be discussed in the conclusion.

NATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN ADAPTATION TO LOUISIANA SOCIETY

The Quebecois Teachers — Nos Frères Acadiens

The Louisianans, the Europeans, and the Quebecois, repeatedly told us that teachers from Québec were suited for Louisiana life, although the Quebecois may not have the most teacher training or classroom experience. A Quebecois summarizes this attitude in comments given to a reporter on his arrival in Louisiana, and before any significant exposure to Cajuns:

We are North Americans who speak French. We know that the Louisianans have their own customs and traditions. So we must cross over to their side and do everything necessary to be accepted by them.

The history of the Acadian Deportation moves us deeply — its visceral — and we are not here to find out whether its going to work with our Acadian brothers. It is an act of faith to the challenge that they have brought forward.

(trans. — 1975)

These sentiments were retained two years later when the Quebec Government asked him to return to Louisiana as a *conseiller pédagogique*. His attitude then reflected the Quebecois concern over their own status as North American francophones.

Everywhere in Louisiana, Quebec is following a policy of culture diffusion, and this requires antenna in the different centres. To make Quebec culture known requires people who are ready to work outside of their regular hours, who will look after the lost generation (young adults who did not benefit from French programmes), and who will let others know that French is alive in North America.

(trans. — 1977)

To examine whether these attitudes reflect those of other Quebecois in Louisiana in 1976-1977, we must first re-examine the data on leisure-time travelling. This reveals that only a third of the Quebecois travelled with other French teachers, while the others preferred to travel alone, or with Cajuns or 'Americans'. Certainly this preference is reinforced by their regional concentration around Lafayette, but elsewhere concentration has resulted in the self-segregation of (European) teachers. The interest in the immediate milieu supports our finding that all of the Quebecois converse regularly with Cajuns and that they have no difficulties with Cajun French.

The difference between the teachers is also linguistic. Cajun respondents on the Prairies, in the Têche region, and in the Bayous have frequently remarked to our researchers that Quebecois were 'easier' to comprehend than the Europeans. Although we would discount some of this assessment to Cajun generosity, similar comments were made about Europeans who spoke a 'rural' French or regional dialects.

Also in line with their status as a North American francophone minority, the Quebecois were the most troubled about language and identity loss among Cajuns, as though it were something that could happen to themselves (*Quand nous partirons pour la Louisiana*). Thus, the Quebecois attitude to French Louisiana was almost always at least affected by nationalist ideologies and by the primordial importance of language to Quebecois as an essential aspect of identity. Remarkably, not a single Quebecois would characterize Louisianans as superficial and along with the Belgians, most Quebecois were sympathetic to Louisiana culture and language. Only 2 Quebecois spoke of the Cajuns as low status, proportionally less than in any other national group.

In terms of a Quebecois appreciation of their own role in Louisiana, it is important to verify whether the teachers felt the same responsibility of Quebec toward Louisiana as did the *conseiller pédagogique*, or the organizers of the exchange, who saw Quebec as the safeguard to the French language in America. However, the response of the teachers is more reserved and cautious: assistance to the Louisianans only if it is requested! Ironically, this is not the image that the CODOFIL leaders have of the Quebecois whom they often see as linguistic missionaries. Perhaps the teachers reacting to European paternalism in the early phases of Quebec's Quiet Revolution?

With few exceptions, all of foreign French teachers arrived with a vague and often erroneous conception of Louisiana. For the Quebecois and the French this image was often mixed with the myths of Cajun folk life. Coming to grips with the reality of this culture was a shock for many, an erosion of their myth of the new world. Cajun conservatism, acculturation, language loss, racism, and the absence of the Cajun some hoped to find, all serve to effectively dampen the enthusiasm of coming to a new milieu. But the degree of disillusionment, and the *new* myths that are created after coming to Louisiana are closely related to differences in nationality.

Only a quarter of the Quebecois retained the image of Louisiana that they had on arrival (as opposed to half of the Europeans), something that we hardly expected from fellow North Americans. The Quebecois realized rapidly that although there may be an *Amérique française*, Louisiana was still fundamentally different from Quebec. Still, 9 of the 10 Quebecois teachers interviewed felt, like the *conseiller pédagogique*, that Quebec had some responsibility to the Louisiana French (see Table 3).

Several Quebecois paused to reflect upon their dilemma at finding francophones who would over-communicate their American nationalism as a primary allegiance, and then also function within a second role set that was concerned with maintaining a traditional culture. Two Quebecois summarize this understanding of Cajuns:

- i) Americans have little culture and are very conservative. It is different with the Cajuns who want change while keeping their traditions. The Cajuns are also more open, especially when you speak to them in French.

- ii) When I first arrived I didn't know what a Cajun was. I thought that the young people were the Americans and the older people were the Acadians.

TABLE 3
PERCEIVED RESPONSIBILITY
OF SPONSORING FRANCOPHONE NATIONS

Nation	France	Belgium	Quebec	
Response				
<i>Definite Responsibility</i>	6 (32%)	10 (56%)	3 (30%)	19
<i>Some Responsibility (or, if asked)</i>	4 (21%)	3 (17%)	6 (60%)	13
<i>No Responsibility</i>	9 (47%)	5 (28%)	1 (10%)	15
	19 (100%)	18 (100%)	10 (100%)	47

Others see Louisiana as similar to Quebec in the Duplessis era, a closed religious and narrow-minded society — the Quebec of their childhood. For many Quebecois, the distance between the rich and the poor is greater than it is in Quebec, and greater still when black-white schisms are included.

As for Cajun French, the Quebecois may be the first to accept it conversationally, but they also recognize that it is not their dialect. Some try to teach vocabulary equivalents and songs in Cajun French, and assert that there must be a "precious defense of French origins in Louisiana". A more sober consequence of dialect difference is provided by two female teachers who concluded that vocabulary differences limit their conversations with Cajuns, but that this may stem from deeper cultural differences. For example:

This is not for my inability to adapt to the Cajuns, on account of the fact that the language is limited to the people's own spheres of interest.

In some respects, the adaptation of the Quebecois to Louisiana is mirrored by that of the Belgians, who are also a linguistic minority in their home country.

The Belgian Teachers — Mission Pédagogique

A Belgian teacher working with radio stations for CODOFIL took a position with regard to Cajun French that represents the extreme of culture advocacy among the Belgians in Louisiana. It is a position that is more flexible than that of APEFE, but also fundamentally similar in that he seeks to open the Cajuns to contacts with international francophones:

I do not go out of my way to speak Parisian French — quite to the contrary — I boost the image of Louisiana French by carrying out interviews with Cajuns. We ask our announcers (French teachers) to use a simple French, without their national colloquialisms . . . a French that is very standard, slowly-spoken, well-articulated and above all with the

occasional Cajun structure to give some confidence to the listener. A Parisian can come here and speak French more incorrectly than a Cajun, and the Cajun will not understand him. (He denounces those Cajun announcers who broadcast "English with a French pronunciation" and who do not try to preserve the French language by correcting the obvious errors in their speech).

This approach to the Belgian presence is balanced by the more reserved assessment of the Lafayette-based head of the Belgian Mission in Louisiana whose objective is that students acquire a competent grasp of a second language using the model of language training in Common Market countries. In this model, International French must be taught first, *but* local culture and lexical items can also be respected. Absent from her approach is the cultural fervor of the Quebecois *conseiller pédagogique*, although her objectives are similar of those given earlier for APEFE. A Belgian *conseiller pédagogique* echoed these comments by insisting that she is somewhat of a purist as far as language in the classroom is concerned, but that she speaks Cajun French with her Cajun friends. In the light of the business-like, almost technocratic sincerity of the Belgian administrators, it is interesting to see how the Belgian teachers adapt to Louisiana.

The Belgians are clearly the most prepared to *teach* in Louisiana (see Table 2). Are they also able to adapt to Louisiana society and to French Louisiana? This is not an insignificant question when it is considered that the Belgians and French, unlike the Quebecois, have had little or no preparation that was either specific to the Louisiana experience or specific to the teaching of a second language. Looked at in a general way, the Belgians present encouraging signs to their hosts. The CODOFIL personnel and a number of chapter leaders were very pleased with the performance of Belgian teachers. Also, Belgians drew fewer of their friends (1/3) from the group of foreign teachers than did any other nationality. Professional involvement seemed to fill the gap. For example, several Belgians who told us that community participation was important, but they did not know how to participate. To some, the community experience was expressed as a culture shock — *déséquilibre culturel* — a milieu for which they felt unprepared. The best adapted Belgians were those who persisted in their community, without travelling, like an unusually adept teacher in Sheveport who, after two years, had still not visited the French parishes.

It is appropriate to ask whether the Belgian ideology for teaching in Louisiana, does not lead to a distant attitude toward Cajun French. That is an outlook that regards Cajun French, like the Wallon dialect at home, as a pleasant and treasured anachronism that has no role in a modern bilingual state. If this is so, and Belgians who read this may disagree, then it is *an ideology that is harmonious with the public position of CODOFIL*.

In practice, unlike the other foreign teachers, Belgians were not generally sympathetic toward Cajun French. Some teachers likened the situation of Cajun dialect and Louisiana English to that of the Wallon dialect and French in Belgium, but others went as far as comparing the situation of all Cajuns with that of all the Wallon French in Belgium, although in our estimation the first of the two comparisons is more tenable. In general the major negative comments about Cajun French were that it is limited, "childish" in its simplicity (according to two teachers) and not amenable to deep discussion. Two other teachers sense that Cajun French is amenable to Cajuns, that is — "when 'they' speak about aspects of *their* lives — but then I understand absolutely nothing".

I have mentioned that the Belgians are the most supportive of CODOFIL's goals. It must be added that they share with the other nationalities a negative evaluation of the possibility of attaining these objectives; there are no significant national differences on this point. Their response, to Louisiana and that of their supervisors is the least nationalistic or sentimental. An interesting support for this argument is that while Quebecois do not like to be referred to as Canadians or as Frenchmen, the Belgians have become accustomed to

letting that kind of ambiguity pass without taking offence. What is puzzling to us, is the finding that the Belgians are the most affirmative that their government has a definite responsibility toward Louisiana!

My interpretation of the Belgian commitment to responsibility is that it is seen as a professional obligation to the success of their programme. That is, there is almost a bureaucratic commitment extended to their government that goes beyond their own assessment of the programme. The presence of a representative of APEFE, concerned mainly with teaching problems, serves perhaps to reinforce this bureaucratic allegiance. Even those Belgians who are strong cultural advocates generally maintain a low political profile within CODOFIL. Could this correspond to the low-profile that some pro-Wallon Civil servants must maintain in the Belgian civil service? It is one thing to work quietly for francophonie, and quite another to overtly transfer these sentiments to a public context, one where language has political connotations.

Teachers from France — La Louisiane française et la France en Louisiane

The objectives of the French Government (CEFEME and the Ministère des Affaires Étrangères) are more or less reflected in the ideologies of the *conseillers pédagogiques* that France retains in Louisiana. In its application, it is a model of cultural assistance that straddles the visceral Quebecois helping hand and the professionalism of the Belgians. In the words of a *conseiller pédagogique* in Louisiana for several years:

The principal objective is to both make known and rediscover a pride for the French language . . . The man on the street is no longer ashamed of his French and the people talk more freely . . . But to say that we will achieve bilingualism in the schools is somewhat more problematic.

Another *conseiller pédagogique* echoed the remarks of numerous French delegations:

France has become aware of the revival of French and that the Louisianais are proud of their language and culture. It would be a pity to see a language disappear. We realized that there was this little corner of the United States that spoke French.

The rapprochement with Louisiana is "sentimental", he adds, rather than an abiding concern for the survival of French in the United States. It was this, a third *conseiller pédagogique* tells us, that led Pompidou to invest in helping Louisiana become bilingual.

But if sentiment is the motivation that began French participation, the French teachers are divided as to whether France has any responsibility to help the Louisianans. In fact, nine (47%) of these teachers (see Table 3) felt that France had no responsibility whatsoever toward the Cajuns — a significantly larger proportion than for Quebec or Belgium. Closer examination shows that the French teachers are as divided in their motives as were the people in France who sent them there. Also, one of the problems that may have led to a negative assessment of France's role is the difficulty that some Frenchmen faced in their new milieu. It should be recalled that 3/4 of the French teachers (see Table 2) drew their friends primarily from among the foreign French teachers and other foreign francophones. The balance, choose Cajuns, and *then* Americans. Some of these teachers are diametrically opposed to the first group in their understanding of the Louisiana situation.

The French seemed to have the greatest difficulty breaking into American friendship groups. One female teacher, working in a large, mostly anglophone city, commented that it was like being in the French countryside where she thought that people were very closed. For her and others, it appears that a reluctance to make friends with English speakers, coupled with a disorientation when faced with Louisiana codes of behaviour, led to withdrawal to whatever francophones were available for good company. Perhaps it is then

appropriate that even socially isolated teachers would feel that France was sending "another culture to Louisiana". But one of these same teachers also remarked that it was "easier to understand Cajuns, than Quebecois! "

Those teachers who handled themselves adeptly in the classrooms often made a real effort to bring the Cajun milieu into their teaching, something they felt that they had to do on a very individual basis, without receiving help from the *conseiller pédagogique* or from CODOFIL. For instance, a teacher stationed in Morreau, a small and predominantly francophone community has shifted progressively (in two years) toward Cajun usages. Another girl, working in a small community in francophone St. Martin Parish, accepts Cajun usages from the children but will not teach them. Nonetheless she insisted that:

They should keep speaking their own French. France must learn that it is normal and right for Cajuns to use anglicisms in their French.

Another teacher, also in a Cajun community was more cynical: "What I am doing is a form of acceptable colonialism, but it is a duty". And, although he feels that standard French is necessary if it is to be written, his wife, teaching in the same schools, thought that Cajun should be integrated into the teaching. Her sentiments are supported by a female teacher in a Prairie community who told us that "you must speak like them to be understood". She hoped to "raise the standard of their French, (through plays and other activities), . . . "because it is not always understandable" (sic). Her dilemma is repeated by the teacher in Barataria who exclaimed: "does one teach a language, or a language that *they* can speak with others? "

Most of these reactions to Cajun communities, although coming from a (sizeable) minority of the French teachers, are concerned with the 'fit' between what they are doing and what they are experiencing. This is not what troubled the Quebecois most. That is, the French were not very concerned with the situation of the Cajuns *qua* minority group, and their principal focus was not on language. A striking exception is an Alsatian girl who speaks her own regional dialect, and shared with the Cajuns her past sense of shame and bewilderment in school. Her social network included young Cajun cultural activists and she has since done some singing with Beausoleil, one of the first Cajun folk-rock groups to be popular both in Louisiana and in France.

These French responses show that the foreign French teacher adaptation to Louisiana society and to Cajun culture has been notably different and that generalizations can be made on the adaptation of each of the three national groups. The argument that I wish to carry forward is that their adaptation to community and culture will strongly affect the performance of the trans-national teacher in the schools. This does not imply that there is a linear relationship between the two contexts, the public and the professional role of the teacher. Earlier comments on the school system emphasized the isolation of many schools from the cultural realities of the communities around them — something that is not unusual in North American society. Whatever the gap between these two milieus, it is in the school that the associate French teachers are contracted to perform.

ADAPTATION TO THE SCHOLASTIC COMMUNITY

The teaching abilities of the foreign francophones were not by themselves sufficient to assure a successful adaptation to the Louisiana schools. In order to visualize this adaptation by several different criteria, our questions focussed on these variables:

- a) the perceived *acceptance* of the French teachers in the school(s) where they work.
 - i) the *objectives set by the teacher* and whether they felt that it would be possible to attain these objectives.
 - ii) the perceived *objectives of CODOFIL*, and whether these could be met.
- b) the reported *ability to work with other teachers*, Cajuns and 'Americans', other foreign French teachers, the parents of their students, or by themselves.
 - i) how *problems of discipline* were settled.
 - ii) *hierarchical relations* with the *conseiller pédagogique*, the Principal, and the (CODOFIL) supervisor for the parish.
- c) the *classroom experience* in terms of the adequacy of the European Frère Jacques method and the teacher's willingness to adapt this method to a Louisiana context.

During the early phases of research the European *conseillers pédagogiques* cautioned us that differences in nationality were less important in the classroom than in the school or in the community. We proceeded as disbelievers, but later, the judgement of the Europeans seemed to have some validity. In fact, the importance of nationality as a dependent variable decreases as the focus of study moves from the community, to the school as a whole, and to the classroom.

A. Acceptance of the Teachers

The Quebecois, to our surprise, felt that they were the most accepted by other teachers. On reflection, we thought that this could be due to their familiarity with large North American Schools, since many of the Quebec teachers are from the first generation to have gone through centralized public schools in Quebec after the near transformation of private colleges. Their greater proficiency in English might also be a factor, but they also were more confident about being accepted.

The Belgians were less willing to claim that they were accepted than the Quebecois, and the French felt the least accepted. However, it is the Belgians who meet most frequently with 'American' teachers outside of the classroom, and they are the only respondents to say that they would discuss teaching problems when they got together with other French teachers.

Acceptance by Louisiana teachers depended greatly on what kind of signals they received from their principal. Is French to be taken as a serious academic subject? Is it part of the essential language arts, since regular grading procedures were not applicable to second language training. In those schools where the daily French class was cut to 20 minutes or less, where discontinuity between classes and grades was not supervised, and where the French teacher received virtually no support from the home room teacher, apathy and disinterest in the school were transferred to the French teacher. The entire school in Louisiana is therefore a miniature social system under the often authoritarian rule of the principal. The French teachers can set whatever objectives they wished, but they were always discouraged when working conditions became unbearable.

National differences in teaching objectives confirm that the Belgians are the most job-centered. Their major concern is that their children be *taught* French, while the Quebecois and the French were concerned that the students *like* their French classes. The Belgians and the Quebecois were the most optimistic about what they were doing. That is, they all had teaching objectives, but six French respondents felt too discouraged to set coherent objectives. The remainder of the French replied positively, in keeping with the highly differentiated adaptation of the group from France. What must be stressed about these objectives, is that whether they are positive or negative, they tend to have a halo effect on all the questions that relate to their feelings about Louisiana and the French Louisianans. *Those who were alienated — dépayés — showed this consistently on all response.* When the

teachers were asked if they understood CODOFIL's objectives, 3/4 of them replied that CODOFIL stood for the preservation and revival of French language and culture, and left the answer at that. The remaining 25% of the teachers were more pessimistic, referring to CODOFIL as a political organization, "Jimmie Domengeaux's movement". Here there was a national difference in replies. The Quebecois subscribed to the Machiavellian view of CODOFIL and the French and Belgians thought of CODOFIL as a bureaucratized social movement.

National differences all but dissolve when the conditions of CODOFIL's success are discussed, and most of the teachers were willing to envisage a chance of success if certain conditions were met. These conditions are almost identical to those listed in the 1978 CODOFIL evaluation (Debyser *et al*, 1978). For the French teacher these are: significant improvements in the qualifications of foreign French teachers selected to come to Louisiana; much greater continuity of students from one grade to the next and from one teacher to another; extension of the CODOFIL contracts to two years so that quality would not be sacrificed to quantity; improvement of working conditions for the French teacher so that French class would be more than a coffee break for some 'American' teachers.

When asked to specify what would be needed to assure the future of French, the replies veered away from CODOFIL's programme and once again did not reflect any significant national differences. The gist of these suggestions was a split between technocratic efficiency and cultural revival. The bureaucratic response was that the program must be expanded, both beyond the inadequate half hour a day and on into the high school grades. These teachers emphasized that the programme must be vastly improved to become a *real* second language education, that is, along the lines of Title VII bilingual programmes already in Louisiana. Then, departing from the school milieu altogether, many strongly suggested that the CODOFIL programme be given meaning in everyday life as an essential support to the relevance of bilingual education. Lastly, a number of teachers argued strongly for the immediate inclusion of more Cajun French in the programme because the immediate audience for the re-learned or second language is the adult generation.

Remaining with the problem of objectives, is a question on whether their experience in Louisiana measures up to their expectations. I have already commented on this for the community, but for the school, the Belgians were explicitly critical about the lack of information given them about the work situation and the reality of the American school system. Many Quebecois felt that their training in Cap Rouge, Quebec, did not deal with the Louisiana situation as they had encountered it through experience. The French were much more vague in answering this question, and many had arrived with little idea of what to expect.

B. Working with Teacher, Parents and Children

The French teacher is an itinerant, moving from home room to home room, at the mercy of the Louisiana teacher for the attention and good performance of every class. The flannel board for Frère Jacques method and all teaching aids must be reinstalled in the short time allotted to each session. Once prepared, the French teachers often had only a minimum of cooperation from their Louisiana homologue. Frequently, the classroom teacher kept the peace while attempting to do something else. In some classes the home room teacher would even leave, or grade papers in apparent boredom. In only a few instances did the teacher participate with the students reacting to the figures on the flannel board. Where we observed this kind of participation the class was totally immersed in the lesson.

When the Louisiana teacher could not control the class, the scenario was pitiful. One teacher we observed in an all black urban school tried to teach (poorly) to a class that was absorbed in its own games while their regular teacher scurried about administering discipline. A remedial reading class continued in the same room, given by a teacher's aid

who shrieked at her three students, while one of them cried with loud sobs.

Most of the French teachers preferred to handle disciplinary problems themselves, although they are not supposed to do this contractually. Some teachers turned to the principals or to the *conseiller pédagogique* to support their disciplinary actions. Classroom control, which would appear to be a minor problem, had become a major issue for the French teachers working in a new environment.

In general the teachers were treated as strangers in their respective schools. The French teacher worked alone, as an externally-imposed component of school life. His contacts with the American teachers were tolerated, on both sides, but it was difficult to get to know the students in so many classes or the parents whom they would see through parent-teacher events. Few teachers thought that their school included them in a teaching 'team'. Some of the teachers in Lafayette and in other large centres spoke of being part of a "group" in the school or parish, sometimes with other French teachers. Most saw themselves as working alone. This situation was complicated by multiple teaching assignments which required some French teachers to travel to as many as three schools daily, with up to fifty miles of travelling between classrooms.

The principal has the ability to change the working conditions that the teacher encounters, and most teachers saw their principals at least once a week, but for some teachers there was little communication between the outsider and the coordinator of the school's entire programme. In many schools the teachers spoke of principals who filled in every available minute and used French as a non-essential filler. There were also extremes of participation when the principal personally assisted the French teacher in setting up a community event. The other extreme is the principal who told his new charge that French was useful to give the children a half hour a day "to clown around".

The *conseiller pédagogique* is only too aware of the capriciousness of some principals and the *conseiller* spends much of his time assuring that his teachers are integrated into the schools. He is seen by most (53%) French teachers as, someone who will consult with them over curriculum and assist with teaching problems. However, a minority of teachers (13%) looked to the *conseiller* as a spokesman with the school officials or with CODOFIL; others (10%) regarded him as a problem solver. The *conseiller pédagogique* is critically important to the adaptation of foreign teachers, and (70%) of the teachers see their advisors on a regular basis. As for the remaining (30%), in a number of cases these *conseillers* thought that "a well-adjusted teacher" could handle his own affairs.

The other hierarchical role of importance is the parish supervisor, a person who helps the teacher adjust in the community and even in his school. The attitudes toward the supervisors were quite positive although their influence seems to vary from parish to parish.

The only trans-national difference of importance in relationship to this hierarchy is that the Belgians sought professional assistance from all of these persons with greater frequency than any other nationality. The multiplicity of hierarchical roles in the school obliged each French teacher to work out their own channels of authority. The limits of this authority chain were the "bilingual specialists" on the level of the sector or of the entire state, persons with whom the teachers had only negligible contacts. Faced with all these authority figures, the teachers did not get much assistance from the CODOFIL guidebook in telling them how something got done.

C. The Classroom Experience

In the classroom, the teachers must use the Frère Jacques method. Some Louisiana educators who have worked on the adaptation of Frère Jacques to lower grades, complained about its rigidity, its overly structured approach and reliance on repetition and drill and role in a context where these methods are not usually employed. Our own observations of Frère Jacques lessons by effective teachers, led us to believe that the method encourages replies

and even provides the framework for its own continuity without leading to a spontaneity of response that encourages communication. An additional problem is that none of the classes we observed adapted Frère Jacques to the context of Louisiana French culture, but that was more a failure of the teacher than of the method.

The teachers had a varied opinion of the effectiveness of Frère Jacques. The skilled Belgians were the most enthusiastic, but the Quebecois, surprisingly, were very positive on the adaptability of the method. The French were about half opposed, but this also reflects the split in adaptation within the French cohort.

When we questioned the Louisiana teachers about the French teaching that they were observing, almost all of the replies singled out the energy and constant movement of the French teachers and some thought this was more 'entertaining' than educational. The European teachers occasionally commented on the teaching method of their Louisiana counterparts, and a *conseiller pédagogique* worried that the skilled and visibly effortless teaching of his instructors, could be misunderstood as a reaction to a facile and simple responsibility. Looking at this misunderstanding from the other side, French teachers were sometimes appalled that the Louisianans taught while sitting at their desks or by reading texts to their students. Evidently, the Louisianans should be coached in working with the French teachers and the outsiders ought to learn more about North American and Southern educational mores.

The Cultural Significance of Differences in Region, Sex and Age

The regional aspect of both school and classroom adaptation is apparent when adaptation is broken down by region. Given the strong cultural differences between the anglo-Protestant north and the franco-Catholic south, regional differences can also be interpreted as cultural differences.

The foreign teachers feel that they are more accepted in the north of the state, although they are least likely to believe that they can meet their objectives in the north. The special effort of principals and Louisiana teachers in the north, and the absence of a legacy of ethnic stigma, make French more attractive in an entirely anglophone milieu. This may explain why American teachers in South Louisiana were isolated from the French teachers, although in the north, they were in constant contact with the visitors. Also, in the north, the first objective is to learn French, but in the south the goal is to get children. This is also the dominant reason given in New Orleans and Baton Rouge. However, *none* of the teachers in the north cut off from CODOFIL, felt that they were adequately informed of what their work would be like, compared to 25% in the south. However, as the French-speaking south is the preferred locale for most teachers, this may account for why a 1/4 of the teachers in the south feel that they will attain their goals. Despite its political and pedagogical success, the programme in the north has divided the opponents of CODOFIL, and was seen with a jaundiced eye by the 1978 evaluation team.

Some differences between the male and female French teachers have cultural implications that are as important as the North-South split. Most important is a greater willingness of males to interrelate with the educational hierarchy. This adds some understanding to another finding that it is the male teachers who regard CODOFIL as a political organization. Recalling that the females are better-trained, the greater ability to maintain class discipline and to adapt to Frère Jacques may be a consequence of differential teaching skills and have little to do with national differences.

Age difference also lead to some qualifications on the importance of nationality. The most notable effect of age in adaptation is a relationship between the group of age 27 and older and harmonious adaptation to the school community. Likewise, the youngest group (19-23) was the most discouraged with their adaptation. But this should not imply that the older teacher, often closer in age to the Louisianans, makes a better choice for an innovative

and temporary trans-national program. It would lead to passing over the best and the most creative teachers who appear to be in the 23-26 age group. Also, the younger the teacher, the more frequently they insist on discussing their work with the *conseiller pédagogique*. This is an advantage when the results of the programme are considered to be critical.

Discussions with senior officials of all four participating nations indicate that the programme is now reaching a level of maturity, and that everything possible will be done to assure that it can run smoothly for several more years before a planned takeover by the Louisianans. As part of this routinization, CODOFIL has hopes that French will now be accepted as part of the basic "language arts" adding importance to what had been often considered as a frill.

I do not wish to underestimate the significance of this administrative change which comes close to the compulsory French courses that supporters of CODOFIL would like to have implanted. However, the weaknesses in the adaptation of the foreign French teachers, as partially outlined in this paper, indicates that accepting French as a core subject may not per se have the intended impact in cultural and linguistic revival. The curriculum can be politically motivated to show results, but unless the overall objective of bilingualism is critically re-examined, the performance of CODOFIL's programme may have to be continually measured by quantitative bureaucratic criteria. That is, will the impending success of the programme lead to the preservation of French language and culture in Louisiana?

Conclusions

Still unanswered is the initial problem: can linguistic affinities be a sufficient basis for linguistic and cultural revival? The Louisiana research, of which only a small portion is discussed in this paper, confirms the CODOFIL assertion that foreign francophones can rapidly and massively inject standard French into the school curriculum. However, there have been serious problems in the adaptation of the 'international brigades' to the local society and to the Louisiana school system. These difficulties are not diminished by linguistic affinity as the comparison between anglophone and francophone regions brings out very clearly.

The data gathered in our research: the accounts of the teachers, their supervisors and authorities in the school system, indicate that the integration of the French teachers into local society is uneven to the point that it is inadequate as a widespread spur to community involvement in a French revival. In the schools, the French teachers have not had the satisfactory cooperation of many Louisiana teachers and school authorities, and the French teachers have done very little to integrate local culture or elements of Cajun French into their teaching. This deficiency stems from inadequate preparation and from a sketchy knowledge of the socio-cultural environment of the schools. However, it is indirectly abetted by the organization and ideology of CODOFIL. The detachment of many Louisiana schools from their cultural environment does little to improve the adaptation of the teachers.

Secondly, a study of trans-national differences in adaptation brings forward a strong relationship between national ideologies of participation in Louisiana and the type of adaptation envisaged by the teachers and his superiors. None of the cooperating nations has a motive of participation that mirrors exactly CODOFIL's objectives, although Belgium comes closest with its professional, technocratic approach. French participation is more complex and includes both a highly competent pedagogical investment alongside of a broader interest in cultural revival. The two sides of the French discourse (*discours*) on Louisiana are sometimes in conflict with each other. Quebec's interest is different from that of France by its specific commitment to the survival of a living language and the continuity of a francophone community in Louisiana.

Whereas French contacts have historically been with the White Creole community, the Quebecois have always developed their ties directly with the Cajun descendants of the uprooted Acadians. Both of these nations express their sympathy with the CODOFIL movement in sentimental terms, but for Quebec, this sentiment is in terms of a vibrant *Amérique française* and for France, it is more of a genealogical tie, a remnant of past empire with close connections to many rural areas of the motherland. The leaders of CODOFIL balance the various foreign francophone interests with their own growing ethnic consciousness. Privately, neither the foreigners nor the Cajuns see a complete convergence of cultural interests on linguistic grounds, but the international alliance is seen as a useful one for the first stages of the state-wide revival of a French language presence in public institutions.

Finally, there is the issue of whether foreign participation, in general, has acted as a positive incitement to ethnic revival. On a regional level, a grassroots movement for the survival of Cajun popular culture (Gold, 1976) has most certainly received encouragement from the foreign francophones. Since 1968, a parallel series of private visits and exchanges has expanded to the point that it is almost as important as the school programme itself. Louisiana has become a part of international francophonie, both in its inter-governmental form and in its expressive and private form.

Opposition to the foreign French teachers is a serious issue in some parishes and its roots are derived from long-standing ethnic sensitivities and from conflicts of ideology and of interest with the visitors. But this conflict may have a very positive effect on the French movement by assuring greater popular participation in the structures that will be put in place to maintain French in the schools after the foreign teachers depart (e.g. modifications to the Second Language Specialist Program). The cultural contacts are unlikely to disappear when the teachers leave, although these ties will probably be related closely to the future direction of the French movement. Another positive result of the foreign presence may possibly be the unification of the heterogeneous and culturally diverse regional groups of francophones, a step toward the formation of a single ethnic consciousness?

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A N N E X E

TEMOIGNAGE PERSONNEL DE M. PIERRE THIBAUD

Monsieur Thibaud, de Périgueux en France, a passé deux ans comme coopérant et enseignant associé à Mamou, village des prairies où la culture cadjine a probablement été le mieux conservée. Il est un excellent exemple d'enseignant cherchant à s'impliquer dans la vie communautaire. Il n'a pas épargné ses efforts pour comprendre le milieu scolaire et pour s'y faire accepter. Or, l'acceptation s'est faite beaucoup plus facilement au niveau des leaders et notables de la collectivité. L'expérience de M. Thibaud illustre de façon marquante les deux mondes auxquels les enseignants associés font face: la collectivité en général et le milieu scolaire. M. Thibaud, qui enseigne aujourd'hui dans les écoles primaires de Périgueux, a rendu ce témoignage à la suite d'une lecture du texte du professeur Gold. Ce n'est pas sa première expérience d'écrivain, car il écrit régulièrement des articles sur son Occitanie natale et ses expériences en Louisiane pour les presses régionales du Périgord et de la paroisse Evangéline en Louisiane.

1972-1974: DEUX ANNEES DE COOPERATION A MAMOU (LOUISIANE)

Pierre Thibaud

I Nous étions quelque deux cent quatre-vingt-dix à débarquer à la Nouvelle-Orléans en la fin du mois d'août 1972. Deux cent quatre-vingt-dix coopérants, des deux sexes, pour la plupart arrivés là par hasard. Il fallait distinguer dans notre groupe les coopérants militaires — majoritaires — et les jeunes filles recrutées par un organisme d'enseignement privé catholique. Je ne suis du reste pas en mesure de savoir, si, en 1978, cet apport privé se perpétue. Ces jeunes filles avaient choisi de venir en Louisiane un an. Certaines décideront d'y rester deux ans. Pour ma part je faisais partie des coopérants militaires français, c'est-à-dire que j'avais choisi d'enseigner à l'étranger pendant deux ans, plutôt que de servir en uniforme dans une caserne de France pendant un an. Si j'avais pu faire ce choix, c'était grâce à mon métier d'instituteur — enseignement primaire — métier qui pendant un temps, ouvrait grand les portes de la Coopération militaire. Pourtant, dans le contingent louisianais, il s'est avéré que les instituteurs étaient loin d'être majoritaires, et que nombre d'entre-nous appartenaient à l'enseignement secondaire, voire même supérieur — universités — et que certains n'avaient jamais enseigné. Cette non-qualification pour le primaire explique en partie certains problèmes psycho-pédagogiques qui se sont posés par la suite dans beaucoup d'écoles.

La plupart d'entre-nous étaient célibataires, mais certains couples, parfois avec des enfants, faisaient partie du voyage. Il serait du reste intéressant de s'attarder sur les nombreux échecs affectifs qu'ont connu les couples de coopérants. Nous n'en avons pas le temps; disons simplement que plongés dans un univers social où hommes et femmes se retrouvent souvent dans des clubs, des réunions, à usage d'un seul sexe, et où les femmes, à la maison sont cantonnées dans leur rôle de mère et de cuisinière, les couples français ont connu des tensions, allant pour certains jusqu'à la rupture. On ne peut pas bien connaître les Louisianais, si l'on reste — comme on en a l'habitude — toujours auprès de sa femme, ou de son mari...

Lorsqu'on remplit son dossier de coopérant, il faut indiquer par ordre de préférence les pays qui vous intéressent, à l'intérieur de plusieurs grands groupes géographiques (Afrique, Amériques, Asie...). La Louisiane... n'appartenait à aucun des groupes que nous avions à choisir! La demande du CODOFIL et son acceptation par le gouvernement français étaient venues trop tard pour que l'on puisse modifier les imprimés traditionnels. Ce qui fait que tous ces coopérants se retrouvaient en Louisiane sans l'avoir voulu, ayant demandé pour la plupart l'Afrique ou l'Asie. On avait envoyé un peu n'importe qui, sans se soucier des qualifications et des motivations de chacun. Dans ce groupe, mon cas était particulier. J'avais trouvé dans la presse quelques lignes rendant compte de la demande par la Louisiane de coopérants à la France. Cette perspective était magique! J'avais donc ajouté à cette liste standard le nom, souligné de *Louisiane*, et par bonheur — ou par hasard — ma demande fut acceptée. Par cela je me retrouvais le seul des coopérants militaires à avoir vraiment choisi d'aller au pays des bayous. Ce qui m'attirait en Louisiane, c'était l'idée de ce pays perdu et oublié des Français, où paraît-il, on parlait encore notre vieille langue! Personne, en 1972,

ne parlait de la Louisiane en France. Il n'en est pour preuve que le tout premier groupe de musique acadienne louisianaise venu en tournée en Europe quelques années auparavant, n'avait trouvé aucun lieu, aucune personne pour s'intéresser à lui en France... alors qu'il était bienvenu en Suède ou en Suisse! A cette époque, je me passionnais pour le Québec, ses poésies et ses hivers, mais sans cet entrefilet de journal, je n'aurais jamais supposé que le français vivait encore quelque part dans le Sud. Je suis arrivé dans ce pays sans la moindre idée quant à son histoire et sa vie actuelle. Bien sûr, "ça" avait été français, bien sûr les champs de coton, les noirs, le jazz, les maisons blanches... Comme pour tout le monde la Louisiane n'était pour moi qu'une série de cartes postales anciennes. Cependant, quelques semaines avant de m'embarquer, je découvrais le premier disque de musique cajun sorti en France, "Folk-songs of Louisiana Acadians" sur lequel on pouvait lire au bas de la pochette: "recorded in Grand-Mamou". Je ne pouvais supposer alors l'importance que prendrait pour moi cette précision musico-géographique.

Attardons-nous un peu sur ces premiers jours de Louisiane, même sur ces premières heures; certains ont connu alors des sentiments qui ne les ont pas quittés pendant deux ans. A peine sortis de onze heures d'avion, on nous embarqua dans de rustiques "school-buses", où par cette nuit orageuse nous étouffions, serrés comme des moutons. Personne ne nous avait indiqué la direction; nous roulions dans une nuit étrange et étrangère, isolés, accablés de fatigue. Mais où étaient les buses à air conditionné des prospectus touristiques et l'accueil chaleureux qu'on nous avait promis? Pour beaucoup, ce voyage de plus de quatre heures dans la nuit a marqué le début d'un désenchantement et d'une rancœur, aussi bien pour la Louisiane que pour nos futurs responsables. Les responsables, nous allions les connaître à Lafayette, car c'était là en effet que nous conduisait cette route de la nuit. Nous allions y rester trois jours, pour prendre contact avec les autorités, nous répartir dans l'Etat, aborder les problèmes pédagogiques — nul ne savait ce qui l'attendait sur ce plan-là. De discours en discours, on finit par comprendre que nous étions sous l'autorité de l'Attaché Culturel français à la Nouvelle-Orléans, que nous serions "supervisés" par des conseillers pédagogiques français, en collaboration avec des inspecteurs américains locaux. L'impression qui me reste de ces trois jours est celle d'un grand flou ensoleillé et intemporel où des dizaines de personnes se retrouvèrent, se quittèrent, sans se connaître pour autant, et, pour la plupart, sans jamais se revoir par la suite. Deux éléments concrets marquèrent cependant notre séjour. D'abord le discours de l'Attaché Culturel, Monsieur Pétinelli. Il nous mit en garde contre l'environnement conservateur qui nous attendait, nous conseilla de couper barbe et moustache, et nous invita à ne jamais aborder les problèmes politiques. Dans notre assemblée où nombre de barbus cotoyaient nombre de militants politiques, ce discours provoqua bien des interrogations et des protestations étouffées. Le second, de ces éléments concrets, fut notre "interview" individuelle par les autorités scolaires louisianaises dans le but de mieux nous connaître et surtout de nous répartir pédagogiquement et géographiquement. L'interview se faisait en anglais pour vérifier notre connaissance de la langue. Ils eurent la surprise de constater que bien peu se débrouillaient dans la langue de l'Oncle Sam! Pour ma part, j'avais la faiblesse de connaître quelque peu la langue, ce qui me valut l'honneur d'une proposition pour enseigner le français à l'Université. Le Comité fut surpris quand je refusai, mais j'expliquai alors que ce qui m'attirait en Louisiane, c'était le "petit monde", la vie de tous les jours, la vieille langue, les enfants, la musique... Je venais d'une province française, le Périgord, où les gens conservent encore souvent une vieille langue/dialecte de l'Occitan. Tous les vieux pays gardent mémoire de leurs anciennes langues et je voulais voir, entre autres choses, si la Louisiane conservait mieux son français que nous, notre occitan! Pour le choix de la région, du village, je demandais Mamou, me souvenant de cette pochette de disque trouvée en France avant de partir. Cela eut l'air de les suffoquer que je connaisse ce nom-là, mais comme j'étais le seul à émettre un vœu précis — mis à part ceux qui demandaient New-Orleans — ils n'eurent aucun mal à me donner satisfaction. "OK boy! Tu vas connaître Mamou et la Paroisse Evangéline; bonne chance!" A ce moment-là, je ne savais

pas — et je ne le sais toujours pas! — si leur ironie et leur éclat de voix, quand je demandais Mamou, sous-entendait de la moquerie — ces gens venaient de la ville — ou une certaine envie par rapport à ce coin de campagne qu'ils m'annoncèrent comme "manière perdue".

La plupart des coopérants furent envoyés pour enseigner dans des écoles publiques de villages du Sud-Ouest de l'Etat, quelques-uns dans le Sud, et une minorité dans le Nord et dans les Universités; les jeunes filles recrutées par voie privée se répartirent elles-aussi dans les écoles primaires publiques, mais aussi confessionnelles. A la fin de ce troisième jour à Lafayette, nous fûmes donc cinq, trois garçons, deux filles, à prendre le chemin de Ville-Platte, capitale de la Paroisse Evangéline. Sans le savoir, nous entrions dans ce qui reste sans doute la région de Louisiane la plus profondément, la plus simplement "cajun". Un aimable "supervisor", Mr James Lafleur, nous conduisit. Les premières impressions face à un monde inconnu, tant physique qu'humain, sont souvent plus épidermiques et anecdotiques, qu'objectivement reçues et digérées. Ce n'est qu'après des jours, des semaines, sinon des années, que ces événements prennent toute leur signification. Aussi, il m'est difficile aujourd'hui de me replacer dans ce contexte quotidien du tout début, mais par contre ce qui me reste — ce qui a filtré, en quelque sorte — sont autant de faits et de dires qui, à bien regarder, étaient déjà marqués de la façon de voir, de penser, d'agir, des Acadiens. Tout d'abord, à notre arrivée à Ville-Platte, le responsable du journal "La Gazette", Jim Soileau, nous attendait et notre premier acte cajun fut de poser pour le "papier" et répondre à des questions! Nous étions agréablement surpris, mais la suite nous fit comprendre qu'il suffit d'être un tant soit peu actif, de tuer quinze écureuils dans sa journée ou de pêcher une tortue plus grosse que la moyenne pour avoir l'honneur des journaux locaux. Après cet accueil journalistique, le School-board nous gratifia de discours — encore d'autres! Puis on finit par nous présenter nos "principaux" d'écoles, qui nous amenèrent dans nos villages et résidences respectifs. Pour moi, direction Mamou, avec le principal de l'Elementary School, Jack Tate. Première mésaventure. Je m'attendais à rouler jusqu'au village dans une "belle américaine" à air conditionné (nous étouffions!); déconvenue; le voyage se fit dans un "truck" cahotant et découvert où il fallait crier pour arriver à communiquer. Ce principal, bien qu'il fut mon futur "boss", était en réalité le premier cajun à qui je pouvais parler sans raison officielle. Sans doute parla-t-on du temps, du paysage, de mon pays... Mais je n'en ai aucun souvenir. Par contre, je sais qu'une de ses premières paroles fut pour me demander de couper mes moustaches "au moins jusqu'aux lèvres", et alors que je m'inquiétais de la situation des écoles publiques depuis que Blancs et Noirs s'y cotoyaient, il me répondit que c'était déjà assez de "tracas et de trouble" de travailler avec les "Nègres" et qu'il ne fallait pas que je pense à les rencontrer en dehors de l'école. Dont acte. Je ne sais si ces déclarations, ces conseils, me choquèrent alors, mais j'allais vite savoir que ce que disait Jack Tate n'était que le reflet, très ordinaire, de la constante sectaire et conservatrice des cajuns. Et je me promis bien de laisser repousser mes moustaches et de rencontrer les Noirs dès que les Blancs m'auraient suffisamment accepté pour me pardonner ces "fantaisies"! Le principal me déposa dans un hôtel en s'excusant de n'avoir pu trouver autre chose. Je compris vite son excuse. J'allais habiter dans une chambre minuscule, étouffante, digne de Faulkner ou d'Erskine Caldwell, une chambre du Sud où le temps semble à jamais arrêté entre une nuit d'amour, un litre de whisky et un voyageur solitaire. Je ne vous cache pas que ce soir-là je pleurai beaucoup et que Madame Naquin, la brave dame qui tenait l'hôtel, eut toutes les peines du monde à me convaincre de "faire comme chez moi". Un énorme ventilateur insufflait de l'air chaud dans toutes les chambres à la fois — mais il fallait laisser la porte ouverte — et ma fenêtre donnait sur un semblant de verdure. Les maringouins se battaient contre la moustiquaire. Il finit par faire nuit. Madame Naquin m'indiqua, en face de l'hôtel, le "People's Coffee", où je pourrais aller dîner un peu. Auparavant je marchai dans le village. Ses rues, désespérément droites n'accueillaient d'autre promeneur que moi et je me demandais bien pourquoi les gens ne sortaient pas en cette seule période

relativement fraîche de la journée. J'appris par la suite que les Américains, Cajuns compris, ne savent plus guère marcher la nuit dans leurs villages, qu'ils ont peur de l'ombre et se rassurent en famille devant la télévision sucrée. J'entrai au "People's Coffee". J'allais enfin rencontrer une hospitalité qui me fit du bien. Si je m'attarde sur ce tout début de ma vie en Louisiane, c'est que ce pays cajun de chaleur, de solitude, existe, loin de la musique, des soupers, des amis "bambocheurs". Certains coopérants, comme certains autres étrangers que j'ai rencontrés par la suite, n'en retiendront que cet aspect, faute d'avoir pu — ou voulu — connaître, si l'on peut dire, "l'autre côté du bayou". Au café, je ne sais plus ce que j'ai mangé ce soir-là, mais j'ai rencontré un lieu et des gens qui ne m'ont guère quitté durant les deux années qui suivirent. Le patron, Loney Guillory, sa femme, une bonne servante ne connaissant que le français et dont, mélancoliquement, j'oublie le nom, me posèrent mille questions. Je crois qu'ils n'avaient jamais vu de Français. Je devais avoir l'air d'un "enfant perdu". C'est du moins ce qu'ils me dirent souvent par la suite! Avec ces gens du premier soir, la prise de contact fut chaleureuse et facile. Je n'ai jamais eu beaucoup de mal à comprendre leur langage; le dialogue fut ininterrompu. Tard dans la nuit, ils me lancèrent un "Au r'voir! R'viens nous voir! ". Ce que je fis des centaines de fois.

A partir du moment où je commençai l'école, j'allais rencontrer de très nombreux Cajuns qui m'invitèrent tout à tour chez eux, sans m'avoir connu plus qu'une journée. Les premiers mois, il ne s'est pas passé une semaine sans que je sois l'hôte à dîner de telle ou telle famille. Bien sûr, chez des enseignants, mais aussi chez toutes sortes d'habitants, car les classes sociales de ce pays, où les gens partagent la même — et pauvre — origine, sont bien moins cloisonnées qu'en France et c'est toute une communauté qui se rencontre et s'interfère jour après jour. Le bonheur dans un pays étranger tient à quelques rencontres, mais c'est une banalité de prétendre qu'il faut savoir provoquer ces rencontres — sinon les attirer intuitivement — et en tirer profit. Et par la suite choisir parmi toutes celles-ci, celles qui peuvent vous conduire au coeur du pays sur un chemin qui soit aussi le vôtre. Nombre de coopérants n'ont jamais rencontré d'hommes ou de femmes de Louisiane qui les ont conduit dans "l'Acadie profonde". Mais ont-ils vraiment souhaité de telles rencontres? Etaient-ils vraiment disposés à faire l'effort de s'adapter au milieu si particulier qu'est celui des Cajuns? Il ne faut pas croire, en effet, que cette "adaptation", rapidement réussie, aille sans difficultés, ni compromissions. Par exemple, j'appris vite qu'un des endroits où l'on a le plus de chances de faire des rencontres et de découvrir les Cajuns tels qu'en eux-mêmes, sont les stades de foot-ball lors des matches du vendredi soir! Personnellement, j'ai toujours eu quelque méfiance face à toutes ces manifestations sportives où, en Amérique peut-être plus encore que dans les vieux pays, le chauvinisme le dispute à la mauvaise foi et à la violence instituée règle de l'art. Il n'empêche que le temps que je connaisse suffisamment de gens, ce qui prit quelques mois, le stade de Mamou eut toutes les semaines l'honneur de ma visite! Bien plus tard, il m'arriva d'y retourner, pour le simple plaisir de partager un "bon moment" de la vie de ces habitants qui étaient mes voisins, mes amis. Le sous-directeur de Mamou-Elementary, Millard Deshotel, m'avait introduit dans un circuit, très étendu, de personnes qui se rassemblent après chaque match pour un énorme "gumbo" de saucisses et de poulets, où chacun apporte sa ration d'alcool et d'histoires en tous genres. A partir du moment où l'on est invité une fois, plus besoin de cérémonial pour les semaines suivantes; seulement se renseigner sur la maison qui prépare la fête du jour! Au cours de ces soirées, j'eus très souvent l'occasion de voir, d'écouter des Cajuns qui en quelques semaines m'avaient déjà donné une impression de leur pays, de leur vie, de leur mentalité. Autre obstacle à franchir — au moins pour ce qui me concerne — l'alcool. Si, en compagnie de Cajuns, vous n'avez pas votre verre plein d'un quelconque breuvage alcoolisé, vous risquez fort de passer pour un triste ou un malade, de toute façon, pour quelqu'un de peu sociable. Détestant bière et whisky — les deux mamelles du Sud — j'optais pour le gin, et, comme un vieil habitué, sortais mon quart de Gordon's à chaque soirée entre amis et habitants...! Cet aspect de la

vie cajun peut sembler anecdotique, mais j'ai connu des étrangers au pays, n'ayant jamais pu connaître plus profondément les Acadiens faute de partager la boisson avec eux. C'est devant une bouteille, au bord d'un bayou, à l'écoute de l'accordéon, que vous rencontrez et comprenez enfin, un jour, le pays des Cajuns. Si leur musique vous fait grincer les dents, si l'alcool vous rebute, si l'eau glauque du bayou vous repousse, il n'y a aucune chance pour que vous rencontriez la "Louisiane profonde". Un jour, un coopérant m'affirma que les Cajuns étaient des gens sans intérêt car "ils ne buvaient pas de Ricard — boisson anisée très populaire en France — et ne jouaient pas au rugby". Le plus triste est qu'il était sérieux, et qu'il n'était pas une exception parmi nous. L'échec de certaines adaptations de Français en Louisiane vient de ce que beaucoup exigeaient de la Louisiane qu'elle "ressemble" à la France, ce qui, en aucun cas, n'est vrai.

Mais le plus important problème d'adaptation — auquel je n'ai pas échappé, mais dont je crois être sorti — était l'adaptation socio-politique. Plus encore que le mode de vie, le mode de pensée et la culture étaient à cent lieues de ce que l'on aurait pu imaginer. Sans entrer dans les détails, on peut dire que le conservatisme farouche des Cajuns, le racisme quotidien, la violence habituelle, le manque de culture et une xénophobie certaine chez nombre d'habitants créent un malaise et une colère rentrée que l'on a du mal à oublier quand on ne veut voir que le "bon côté des choses". L'important, là encore, est de dépasser le stade de la critique systématique pour entamer celui de l'interrogation, puis de la compréhension; ce qui ne veut pas dire celui de l'excuse ou de la complicité. J'ai passé deux ans avec certains amis qui n'avaient pas le moins du monde mes idées, mais à aucun moment je n'ai fait semblant d'être de leur avis. J'ai toujours essayé de leur faire "voir" leur situation, comme ils ont essayé de me faire comprendre leur attitude, et, si j'ose dire, on s'est enrichi de nos défauts et de nos contradictions. Et ceci, non seulement avec les intellectuels — ils sont rares comme neige en été dans la campagne louisianaise — mais surtout avec des petites gens, chaleureuses et qui sont prêtes à discuter de leur vie et de leurs idées avec vous, sans malentendu ni faux-semblant. La politique, au sens politique du terme, je ne l'ai observée que d'un point de vue anecdotique et amusé, tant les occasions de s'affronter par le vote sont nombreuses en ce pays, sans que l'on arrive véritablement à savoir qui pense quoi! De toute façon, ces affrontements se terminent en général par un souper et des histoires où vaincus et vainqueurs se retrouvent, apparemment sans grincements de dents. Il n'était pas question pour nous de participer directement ou indirectement à la vie politique. Les autorités nous l'avaient soigneusement interdit et la communauté cajun comprend difficilement qu'un étranger intervienne dans leur vie politique. S'il y a un point qui peut empêcher une adaptation complète au monde acadien — outre les différences de culture ou de mentalité — c'est cette impossibilité faite aux étrangers d'émettre des critiques, et à la limite donner des conseils sur tout ce qui touche à la vie et aux événements publics officiels ou semi-officiels. Je peux citer deux exemples assez significatifs. Écrivant depuis plus d'un an un éditorial bilingue pour le "Mamou Acadian Press", j'avais eu la malencontreuse idée de formuler ces réserves sur le chanteur local Jimmy C. Newman, dans le sens où celui-ci, ayant abandonné Mamou et le français pour Nashville, revenait soudain au village depuis que la chanson cajun s'était mise à rapporter de l'argent à quelques-uns, dont il voulait faire partie! On le présentait partout comme le "champion de la musique cajun", et Mamou offrait un "Cajun Day" en son honneur! Connaissant des dizaines de véritables chanteurs et musiciens acadiens — dont la presse ne parle que très rarement, sans doute parce qu'ils font partie du paysage humain quotidien — j'avais noté ces impressions dans mon éditorial et je conclusais par: "Si on peut dire que J.C. Newman est le plus grand chanteur cajun, alors on peut dire aussi que moi, je chante comme Sammy Davis..." Le directeur du "papier", Mike Deshotel, me convoqua, m'injuria, et je dus m'enfuir pour éviter qu'il me frappe (sic). "T'es Français, t'as pas le droit de dire ça, retourne chez toi, etc..." Même une institution aussi superficielle et fallacieuse qu'un médiocre

chanteur country, il ne faut pas y toucher . . . si vous n'êtes pas Cajuns!

Le deuxième exemple me vient d'un couple d'amis de Washington, Ron et Foy Stanford, qui restèrent deux ans dans la campagne de Basile à étudier le folklore et la vie cajuns. Lors d'une réunion, ils "osèrent" conseiller à Jimmy Domengeaux — Président du CODOFIL — de donner plus de place à la musique dans son effort pour sauver la culture française en Louisiane. Leur avis fut accueilli avec mépris et on leur conseilla de reprendre le premier Greyhound pour le Nord. Mais un an plus tard, Domengeaux faisait un discours en l'honneur de la musique cajun, faisant oublier à beaucoup qu'il avait maintes fois affirmé ne rien connaître à cette musique — sans doute trop vulgaire — et l'aimer encore moins!

Si l'adaptation complète, c'est-à-dire tant matérielle que psychologique et spirituelle est à mon avis impossible pour un Français en Louisiane, une adaptation parfaite à la vie communautaire peut avoir lieu: je pense l'avoir en grande partie réalisée. Des personnalités m'y ont aidé, aussi différentes qu'exceptionnelles. Sans trop m'y attarder, je peux parler des plus importantes, de celles qui ont vraiment influé sur ma vie de tous les jours dans Evangéline. D'abord Revon Reed, de Mamou, à qui me présenta le directeur d'école Jack Tate. Revon — qui ne voulait plus entendre parler de français quand on me présenta à lui — est sans doute l'homme qui connaît le mieux le petit monde de la Louisiane, celui, qui, un des tous premiers, prit conscience de l'aspect unique de son peuple et voulut le faire sortir de l'ombre du géant américain. Avec lui, j'ai rencontré des dizaines de musiciens, conteurs, gens de tout ou de rien, tous profondément Acadiens. Revon m'ouvrit les portes de la Louisiane qui chante, de la Louisiane qui pleure, la porte des étrangers de tout poil qui la visitent, la porte de la Louisiane qui bouge. Des pages ne suffiraient pas à essayer de me rappeler tout ce que nous avons vu et ressenti ensemble. Des pages ne suffiraient pas à essayer de décrire la personnalité complexe de cet homme seul — et souvent incompris — à l'écoute de centaines d'autres.

En second, je dois parler de Monsieur Lee Douget et de son épouse, qui par l'intermédiaire de l'école de Mamou — Madge Perron — me procurèrent une chambre dans leur maison. Monsieur Lee et sa femme me prirent dans leur famille comme un des leurs. Des heures, il me parla de sa vie, de son enfance, du monde d'aujourd'hui, de son seul grand voyage, un jour, vers El Paso . . . En fait, par chance, j'étais tombé sur une des personnalités les plus attachantes de Mamou! Il me raconta aussi à sa manière, le Nord, les Yankees, les Nègres, la guerre, le temps qu'il fait, les oiseaux et les champs. Lee et sa "vieille" me racontèrent la vieille Louisiane jour après jour; je les regardai vivre pendant deux ans, recevant leurs enfants, leurs amis "les soirs à la veille". Lee a dépassé 70 ans, et sa femme doit en être bien près. Tous deux ne parlaient pas anglais. A ce moment-là — mais cela a-t-il changé? — rien n'était fait pour eux et leurs semblables dans la vie sociale et culturelle au niveau de l'Etat et des médias, si importants dans ce pays. Leur poste de télé, réduit au rôle de décor, marchait des heures durant dans une langue qui n'était pas la leur et qu'ils ne maîtrisaient pas. Ils n'étaient en rien misérables — même si leur jeunesse, comme celle de tous les Cajuns, fut plus que modeste — leur maison de briques était toujours fraîche, la nourriture abondante et bonne. Ils furent une famille pour moi, et au bout de deux ans la séparation fut assez pénible . . . Certains coopérants eurent comme moi la chance de tomber sur une "vaillante famille cajun" comme celle de Lee Douget, et leur séjour en Louisiane y gagna en bien-être et en humanité. Mais beaucoup de Français, sans doute la majorité, s'installèrent dans des appartements indépendants, souvent à plusieurs. S'ils y gagnèrent en "liberté", ils eurent par contre beaucoup moins l'occasion de partager le quotidien des gens de Louisiane, et leur expérience fut en général médiocre.

Enfin, je voudrais dire quelques mots de la famille de Madame Bacon, à Basile, qui m'accueillit des dizaines de fois, le dimanche, ou simplement quand un peu de solitude se faisait ressentir à Grand-Mamou. Avec Madame Bacon, j'ai connu, et aimé, une famille typique de la "Louisiane moderne", unie, active, les enfants éparpillés aux quatre coins de

l'Etat, mais ne manquant pas une occasion de se rassembler et d'avoir un souper autour du lac familial. Cette famille était pourtant exceptionnelle de par la personnalité de Madame Bacon, femme admirable de courage et de générosité humaine. Son mari, "Red" Bacon, s'était battu pour rendre effective la loi d'intégration des Noirs dans l'Ecole Publique Blanche. Il était alors Président du School-board de Ville-Platte, et malgré les menaces permanentes (l'année qui précéda notre arrivée, Ville-Platte accueillit le plus grand rassemblement du K.K.K. de ces dernières années au niveau du Sud tout entier), malgré l'hostilité ouverte de tout un village qui se ligua contre lui et sa famille, il gagna la bataille de l'intégration. Mais cette épreuve vint à bout de sa santé fragile, et il disparut prématurément. Madame Bacon, à son tour, nous a quittés l'année dernière. Cet été 1978, j'ai accueilli à Paris deux de ses filles, Becky et Georgiana — c'est à Becky que je dois la découverte de la Nouvelle-Orléans et du Sud de l'Etat. Et comme lorsque Revon Reed était passé nous voir dans notre coin de France, j'ai constaté en silence, et avec joie, que des liens d'amitié et d'affection, tissés sans compromis à des milliers de kilomètres de là, résistent sans faiblesse au temps et à l'espace. La Louisiane m'aura aussi appris cela.

Revon et la musique du "p'tit monde", Monsieur Lee, sa vieille Louisiane et sa maison douce, Madame Bacon et sa belle famille de Cajuns d'aujourd'hui, voilà bien les trois rôles principaux de mon adaptation et de mon bonheur en Louisiane. Autour d'eux s'est tissée ma vie de tous les jours dans ce pays, où du premier au dernier moment j'ai essayé de vivre à l'unisson des gens. Je n'ai pas la place de raconter les Noirs — la deuxième année j'allais en rencontrer plusieurs, fréquentant les bals français "créoles" sans que cela provoque autre chose que de l'intérêt ou de l'amusement chez mes amis Blancs — je n'ai pas non plus fait allusion aux autres coopérants de la Paroisse qui ont de leur côté connu "leur Louisiane", plus "frivole", plus officielle, ou plus seule, que celle à laquelle je me suis mêlé. Je dirai pourtant un mot de l'un d'eux, Robert Seyferth, un "bougre" de Grenoble, garçon réservé, peu enclin aux rapports sociaux de prime abord, et qui pourtant dans son travail et ses relations avec les gens d'Evangéline s'est révélé comme un de ceux qui s'étaient le mieux adaptés parmi nous. Sur un plan personnel, je dois à Robert deux années d'amitié égrainées de rencontres, de discussions, de voyages, de colères, d'humour; souvent, dans sa chambre de la rue Washington à Ville-Platte, nous mettions entre parenthèses le monde qui nous entourait et revenions vers ses montagnes des Alpes ou nos collines du Périgord. Il est nécessaire parfois de se souvenir de son pays, quand on l'a quitté!

Je n'ai pas parlé, non plus, du reste de l'Etat dans sa partie francophone. Je l'ai visité, mais je n'ai pas eu le temps de m'attarder et de le comparer avec ce que je connaissais; Evangéline peut parfaitement vous occuper pendant deux ans! Et je n'ai rien dit des Indiens de la forêt d'Elton qui, les jours de fête, chantent pendant le Service religieux des chants anglais, français, indiens... Sans doute les seuls trilingues des Etats-Unis! Je me suis promis, un jour, de mieux les connaître.

II Dans tous ces rapports sociaux et amicaux, la langue de communication était généralement le français: Evangéline est une des paroisses les plus francophones de l'Etat et dans les boutiques, à la banque, au barbier, vous avez peu de chances d'entendre parler anglais... Sauf, si bien sûr les adultes s'adressent aux enfants ou aux adolescents. Rapidement, on peut observer que le français est utilisé davantage par les hommes — langue du travail rural — que par les femmes, surtout si celles-ci sont jeunes. Il n'est pas rare de rencontrer des adolescents s'exprimant "cajun", mais les filles du même âge, même si elles connaissent quelque peu la langue, mettent une sorte de honte à l'employer. Sans doute parce que ce n'est ni élégant, ni "américain"... "L'Ecole a tué le français, l'Ecole doit le sauver" aiment à répéter les slogans du CODOFIL. La Louisiane, officiellement bilingue depuis 1968, tend à rendre obligatoire l'usage du français dans les écoles élémentaires. Il existe un programme bilingue au niveau de l'Etat, et le programme d'éducation du CODOFIL. Mon expérience concerne donc cette deuxième approche de l'éducation en français en Louisiane.

A Mamou je me retrouvais dans l'école élémentaire dirigé par Jack Tate — ne pas confondre avec Paul Tate, l'avocat de Mamou, apôtre de la première heure de la culture et du peuple cajuns. L'accueil que je reçus fut spontanément chaleureux, amical, et plein de compréhension. Mes collègues américains, en majorité des femmes, firent tout leur possible pour me faciliter la tâche et le contact avec les élèves. Jack Tate me présenta à toutes les classes, m'introduisit comme étant "Monsieur Pierre", appellation qui me resta parmi les "kids" durant les deux années de mon séjour! Quant au programme que j'avais à enseigner, il consistait uniquement à favoriser le français comme langue de communication orale, sans notion écrite. Redonner aux enfants la connaissance et le goût d'une culture qui les abandonne peu à peu. Nous avions à notre disposition, au moins pour la première année, une méthode de type "Frère Jacques", basée sur le dialogue, le commentaire d'images, les comptines; cette méthode était destinée à l'origine à l'apprentissage du français chez les jeunes enfants non-francophones. Il y avait trop peu de temps que le programme était en vigueur pour que l'on ait eu le temps de mettre au point une méthode purement louisianaise. Ce qui personnellement me posait des problèmes, tant au niveau de l'enseignement avec les enfants, qu'au niveau de mes relations avec les responsables de l'Éducation, français ou américains. Je me suis vite rendu compte que le contenu de cette méthode très "français pour la France" — ne correspondait que très peu à ce qu'attendaient de moi élèves et parents. Les petits et grands Cajuns, attendaient que je favorise le dialogue entre générations cajuns, alors que je leur proposais un français standard qui pouvait certes les intéresser ou les amuser, mais en aucun cas favoriser la pratique de la langue dans les familles. Chaque jour j'avais des élèves pour m'annoncer: "M'sieur Pierre, quoi faire tu dis "voiture", Pap m'apprend "un char"? Et Pap avait raison. Ce qui fait qu'assez vite j'ai voulu donner à mes discussions avec les élèves — une heure par classe, en deux fois, chaque jour — un ton cajun, en employant autant que je le pouvais un vocabulaire local. Il n'était pas question pour moi de les "imiter", de "jouer au cajun", mais de véhiculer un son et des mots qui leur soient familiers et dans lequel ils se retrouvent. Je ne supprimais pas pour autant les expressions français-standard, mais leur donnais chaque fois que cela était nécessaire un équivalent cajun.

Par contre, les élèves apprenaient avec une joie évidente les mots de "bon français", chaque fois qu'ils désignaient des objets que les parents ne savaient nommer qu'en anglais. A la suite de quoi, les parents venaient souvent vers moi, dans la rue, au café, à la boutique, pour me dire avec quelque fierté amusée un mot que leur "tit garçon" avait rapporté de l'école. Par exemple, "l'avion", "le disque". Après deux ans je remarquais que de plus en plus d'adultes et de jeunes essayaient d'employer ces mots français à la place des expressions anglaises. Je pense que cette évolution est en grande partie due à l'éducation des enfants dans les écoles, à Mamou comme ailleurs. Notons aussi, dans le même sens, le rôle des animateurs de radio en français, qui pour beaucoup ont fait alors l'effort de moins employer de termes anglais dans leurs émissions. Remarquons une exception, très pittoresque, celle du présentateur de K.V.P.I., Ville-Platte, qui pouvait annoncer sans honte que "le bougre était gone pour le week-end avec l'air-plane d'son boss!" (sic). A propos d'avion, un petit souvenir linguistique et amical pour mon bon propriétaire Lee Douget. Il me dit un jour "alors, t'es après t'en aller sur le gros aéroplane?". C'est la seule fois que ce vieux nom d'"aéroplane", dont la France a perdu l'usage, est venu frapper mon oreille en Louisiane. Sans doute avait-il été connu au début du siècle? Revenons à l'éducation. J'eus assez de mal à convaincre mes "supervisors" du bien fondé de cette préoccupation "cajun" dans les classes de français des petits. Le CODOFIL pensait — et pense toujours — que l'on doit apprendre le français-standard, pour être compris de toute la communauté francophone. Cela est peut-être vrai. Mais je pense, d'après ce que j'ai connu, vu ou entendu, que les Cajuns ont d'abord — et ce n'est que très légitime — le désir de pouvoir communiquer dans leur propre langue, si imparfaite ou anachronique soit-elle, avant de s'exposer aux moyens du

français-standard et passe-partout. La culture cajun est aux antipodes de la culture francophone en général. On veut parfois transformer les Cajuns en Français ou en Québécois. Cela n'est souhaité par personne en Louisiane, sauf par ceux qui portent quelque intérêt personnel — ou économique? ou politique? — dans cette affaire. Ceux-là, au dire du principal Jack Tate, sont plus nombreux que l'on ne le croit. Si je reviens à Jack Tate, c'est qu'après un an de service dans son école — service qu'il suivit de l'extérieur sans jamais intervenir pour autre chose que des problèmes généraux de discipline ou d'administration — il me convoqua pour m'annoncer qu'il se passerait de mes services pour l'année qui suivait. J'irais désormais porté la bonne parole à Vidrine Elementary, qui voulait bien de moi, à quelques milles de là... Mon sentiment d'alors fut un mélange, assez violent, de déception, de colère et de tristesse mêlées. Pendant plus d'une heure, Jack Tate m'expliqua ses motivations, qui m'apparurent alors sans fondement, mais qui méritent réflexion dans la mesure où j'ai depuis rencontré beaucoup de gens intéressés dans la Louisiane et qui pensent plus ou moins comme Jack Tate, sans aller toutefois au bout de leurs idées. Pour lui, le CODOFIL est un repaire de gens riches qui se rendent soudain compte qu'ils sont Cajuns, après avoir méprisé leurs origines durant de longues années. Selon lui, ils ne sont que très peu sincères; leur souci est avant tout d'ordre économique et politique. Le français pour les enfants? Il est pour, mais seulement si c'est enseigné par les Cajuns, hors du programme CODOFIL. Il m'expliqua, me répéta, que cette décision n'était en rien contre moi, et qu'il n'avait "que des compliments à me faire". Il voulut me convaincre de son amitié. Je partis en montrant mon incompréhension et ma colère. Conscient de ne pas m'avoir convaincu, il partit alors rencontrer l'ami Revon Reed chez lui — cela ne lui était jamais arrivé — pour que Revon me fasse comprendre que ce n'était sincèrement pas contre moi qu'il agissait, mais contre le CODOFIL et ceux qui le représentent...

Je digérais ma tristesse et ma rancœur durant l'été, et prenais en septembre la route de Vidrine dans ma fidèle, et très fatiguée, Mustang blanche 68' (comme pour beaucoup de jeunes Français, la Mustang faisait partie du rêve américain et je décidais en arrivant de satisfaire cette "folle envie"; en fait j'appris vite que ma "belle américaine" n'était qu'une voiture bien modeste, et pendant deux ans on se moqua souvent de mon "vaillant 'tit char qui était manière lasse"). A Vidrine, l'expérience scolaire fut sensiblement la même qu'à Mamou Elementary. Nous avions une méthode, plus adaptée à la Louisiane, que nous pouvions suivre tous les jours. Personnellement, elle me servait de point de repère, mais j'ai toujours essayé de lier la classe et la vie de tous les jours, parlant des saisons, du travail, de la famille, des fêtes. Le livre n'était pour moi qu'une "référence objective" où je vérifiais l'état des connaissances de mes élèves. Le contexte humain fut cependant différent à Vidrine, cela tenant à des facteurs d'environnement personnels, ainsi qu'à une plus grande souplesse dans la discipline. A Vidrine, entre autres choses, je n'étais plus obligé de subir chaque jour l'étouffante cravate imposée à Mamou Elementary! Le directeur, Monsieur Miller, s'intéressa souvent à mon travail, ainsi qu'à celui d'une collègue américaine de Ville-Platte, Cathy Prudhomme; paradoxalement, cette maîtresse louisianaise me demandait chaque matin quelques mots cajuns pour mieux se faire comprendre des élèves. J'allais oublier l'importance que j'ai toujours donnée aux chansons cajuns dans mes rapports avec les enfants. Dans ce pays où la culture est essentiellement orale, et chantée, les chansons tissent entre les gens des liens profonds et chaleureux. J'ai essayé de recréer ces liens dans les classes, et je crois avoir le plus souvent réussi. Je n'ai jamais été si déçu que lorsque, dans les réunions pédagogiques, je me rendais compte que la plupart des coopérants assommaient leurs "tits cajuns" de "Frère Jacques" ou "Sur le pont d'Avignon". Vraiment, voilà de drôles de façons de sensibiliser les enfants de Louisiane à leur propre culture! Nous étions quelques-uns à regretter, à nous élever contre cette francisation excessive de l'enseignement — simples instituteurs ou conseillers pédagogiques. Je me demande si des voix semblables aux nôtres ont fini par se faire entendre en 1978...?

Cet enseignement du français dans les écoles était très bien ressenti dans les familles. J'ai eu maintes fois l'occasion de rencontrer des parents, ou de simples habitants, venant me dire leur joie et leur satisfaction devant un tel programme. Ils regrettaient en général de n'avoir pas su, ou voulu, donner eux-mêmes à leurs enfants cette culture française et se félicitaient qu'enfin, on fasse quelque chose de positif. Pourtant, ils sont nombreux à se demander si cet effort n'est pas trop timide, ni trop tardif, ni trop "français de France". Le français en Louisiane sera sauvé par les Acadiens eux-mêmes ou ne le sera pas. Nous autres, que l'on soit Français, Suisse, Belge, Québécois ou simple amoureux de la francophonie, nous pouvons les soutenir dans cet effort de préservation, mais nous ne pouvons éternellement nous mettre à leur place. Il faudrait des centaines et des centaines d'enseignants véritablement cajuns, au sein de chaque communauté, pour arriver à dérouiller cette culture qui s'en va.

J'ai parfois pensé qu'en plus des enseignants diplômés, on pourrait faire appel à des "lecteurs", simples habitants des villages, possédant une certaine culture — jeunes et vieux, hommes et femmes — et qui viendraient discuter avec les élèves dans les écoles plusieurs fois dans la semaine. Je ne suis ni linguiste, ni sociologue culturel, et cette solution peut paraître utopique aux spécialistes. Mais cette idée m'est venue, constatant une certaine carence des coopérants étrangers, et le manque persistant d'enseignants locaux.

III Entre éducation, voyages, sorties et amitiés, deux ans se passèrent dans ce pays que je quittais comme on quitte un bon ami dont on connaît les défauts, mais dont on apprécie par-dessus tout les qualités. Je quittais la Louisiane avec regret, amour et tendresse. Le retour en France avait été précipité, les autorités du CODOFIL nous obligeant, en dépit de toutes leurs promesses et des usages de la Coopération, à rentrer en France aussitôt la fin des classes, dans un avion spécial. Comme s'ils avaient voulu se débarrasser de nous. Ce retour en force, qui nous priva de nombreuses visites à nos amis et de derniers voyages dans le pays, est mon seul véritable mauvais souvenir de Louisiane. Mais ce n'est pas au petit peuple cajun que je le dois.

Ce que m'a apporté ce séjour en Louisiane, il m'est bien délicat de l'analyser moi-même. Mais cette expérience, unique, m'a fait revenir en France riche de mille choses, de mille idées, que je n'aurais jamais soupçonnées en restant dans mon pays. La Louisiane m'a aussi permis de rencontrer des dizaines de personnalités attachantes, rares, et toujours intéressantes. De retour en France, il n'était pas question pour moi de "couper les ponts" avec la Louisiane. Au contraire. Sur le plan public, j'ai continué d'écrire des articles pour "La Gazette" de Ville-Platte, dirigée alors par Jim Soileau — le premier cajun d'Évangéline à nous avoir accueilli avec amitié; Jim est un des hommes les plus modestes et les plus intéressants que l'on peut rencontrer dans la Paroisse, et sans doute au-delà. Aujourd'hui il est retourné à la station KVIP, et je suis sûr que la qualité du programme en français s'en est sensiblement améliorée! Sur le plan privé, je n'ai cessé de garder le contact avec mes amis de là-bas. Ce "bain cajun", j'ai pu aussi le continuer en France grâce aux nombreuses visites d'amis acadiens qui sont passés nous voir en Périgord. Revon Reed, bien sûr, mais aussi toute la famille des frères Balfa, Bessyl Duhon, Allie J. Young, tous ces derniers étant des musiciens qui ont recueilli, lors de tournées en France, un accueil très chaleureux du public venu à leur rencontre. J'ai pu aussi renouer contact avec le chanteur américain vivant en France, Roger Mason, rencontré à Mamou un jour de Mardi-Gras. Mason est le premier à avoir véritablement oeuvré pour les Cajuns et leur musique en France, tout en se préservant de "jouer au cajun", ou de s'identifier à eux, contrairement à certains autres qui lui ont succédé dans cette voie. Sur le plan familial, mon épouse Martine était venue me voir deux fois lors de mon séjour — nous n'étions pas encore mariés — ce qui fait que les cajuns n'étaient pas étrangers à la famille et que nous pouvions parler souvent d'un monde que tous deux connaissions.

Mamou, vu de la France, aujourd'hui, c'est un village ami que j'aimerais rencontrer de nouveau, et que nous rencontrerons de nouveau, un jour. Au-delà des problèmes de francophonie et d'éducation. Trop de gens veulent s'emparer désormais des Cajuns, sans avoir pris le temps de les connaître, de les comprendre. Lorsque j'ai quitté la France en 1972, personne n'avait jamais parlé sérieusement, et longuement, des Cajuns. Au retour, j'ai découvert nombre d'articles, d'émissions de radio ou de télévision traitant des Louisianais français. Il y a même eu une opération très officielle "Louisiane bien-aimée", organisée par la Radio Nationale avec échanges, discours, voyages entre nos deux pays. Opération dont on peut se demander à qui elle a bien pu profiter. Elle a contribué à sensibiliser les Français à la Louisiane, mais dans la mesure où son écho a été des moindres au pays des bayous, à quoi bon toute cette publicité, toute cette dépense d'argent et de volonté? Je n'ai pas entendu une émission de radio qui aille un tant soit peu au coeur des Acadiens. Le principal défaut de tous nos journalistes étant de considérer les Acadiens comme des gens de culture française assimilables aux Québécois. Ce qui fait que très souvent les Cajuns interviewés ne représentent qu'un point de vue officiel — CODOFIL — ou caricatural des Acadiens — statufiés en écrevisses. Le problème venant aussi du langage intellectuel de nos journalistes, peu informés de la réalité linguistique louisianaise. Ainsi ce représentant de Radio-France demandant à un avocat acadien le "pourquoi profond" des motivations culturelles des Cajuns dans le "contexte américain". Je ne peux me souvenir des termes compliqués employés par le journaliste, mais notre avocat — de Jennings, je crois — ne comprit que le mot "cajun" dans cette longue question... et se mit à expliquer que "cajun" venait d'"acadien", que c'était une déformation, etc, etc. Ce genre de malentendu est assez triste, d'autant plus qu'il est fréquent. Seuls des personnalités comme Revon Reed ou Dewey Balfa ont réussi à exprimer en France leur "Louisiane profonde" face aux micros et aux magnétophones. Quant aux émissions réalisées par la France, directement de Louisiane, elles rassemblent régulièrement des personnalités toujours choisies, ou indiquées par le CODOFIL. Cela se passe comme si cet organisme, fort utile par ailleurs, s'était définitivement approprié les Cajuns et leur culture. Non, il est des milliers de Cajuns qui n'ont jamais entendu parler du CODOFIL, et qui ont malgré tout leur Louisiane à raconter, leur langue à nous faire connaître, et des espoirs mal exprimés à nous faire partager.

Mais "ma Louisiane, ma Louisiane", comme chante Zachary Richard, "chaude en été, fraîche en hiver" n'a que peu à voir avec le CODOFIL, les émissions officielles et Saint Martinville, que l'on veut maintenant jumeler avec Versailles... (sic). Notre Louisiane reste en Louisiane, dans les maisons, au bar de chez Fred dans la VIème rue de Mamou, dans le clos de riz, avant la tornade, et en France dans l'âme et le coeur de quelques isolés qui l'ont connue chez elle et se plaisent à s'en souvenir.

Quelques mots pour terminer. La Louisiane m'aura appris une chose unique, que j'aurais peut-être fini par rencontrer mais qui jusque-là m'échappait: rester à l'écoute des gens. Des gens de son pays. Des gens de n'importe quel pays, des gens que l'Histoire a toujours oubliés et qui vivent avec chaleur, fraternité, dans quelque village près d'ici. Revenu en France, j'ai eu envie de rencontrer les gens de nos campagnes comme j'avais rencontré ceux de la campagne louisianaise. J'ai commencé à écrire pour un magazine traitant de nos régions du Sud, j'ai repris mon appareil photo le long des routes. (En revenant en France, j'avais fait plusieurs expositions de mes photographies sur la Louisiane des Cajuns). Pourtant, écrire, photographier, pour mon pays m'est moins facile que d'écrire ou de photographier la Louisiane des Cajuns! On ne sait pas toujours regarder son paysage familier. D'autre part, si l'on trouve en France beaucoup de personnalités originales, les groupes sociaux et culturels n'ont pas le caractère unique que représente la réalité cajun dans le contexte américain. Chez-nous les traces sont plus dures à différencier, les frontières humaines, linguistiques, s'effacent. Mais il y a toujours quelqu'un à écouter, quelqu'un à reconnaître. C'est la Louisiane qui m'a appris, qui m'a révélé, combien peut-être passionnante la vie et l'expérience d'un simple "homme du pays".

Comme la Louisiane, il est des pays et des gens que l'on aimerait prendre par la main. Des gens, des cultures, qui se perdent et que l'on rêve d'aider à retrouver le chemin de leurs origines, nous donnant par là-même des raisons, et l'envie, de remonter à notre propre source.

Pierre Thibaud

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